とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）22
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 22

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 22

Fiamma of the Right, the final member of the dark side of the Roman Catholic Church, "God's Right Seat". His plan is finally set into motion.

As World War 3 rages on, a gigantic fortress hovers above the skies of Russia. Its name is the "Star of Bethlehem".

It is said that Fiamma's plan will not only "save" Christians, but also humanity as a whole. But as it turns out, the plan is nothing but the summoning of a great disaster, one on a scale that's unheard of throughout mankind's history. As Fiamma's desire for "cleansing" slowly creeps into realization, three young men, each with their own feelings, still fight on.

Hamazura Shiage, with Takitsubo Rikou's treatment over, goes to prevent the Kremlin Report, but he is immediately confronted by an old enemy, Mugino Shizuri.

Accelerator, who barely managed to get away from the Archangel Misha, finally found "a certain solution" to save Last Order. Yet that method truly is a forbidden one.

And Kamijou Touma, in order to stop the operation of the "Star of Bethlehem", in order to free Index, challenges Fiamma on his own...

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Kamachi Kazuma

Well then, the main story alone is already 22 volumes long. It's been quite a long way so far, but I hope I managed to tie things up and conclude the story.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~22
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
Heavy Object
Heavy Object: Adoption War

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

For a change of pace, I bought a small RC Helicopter to be used indoors. But why when I'm the one controlling, isn't it less 'controlling a helicopter' and more 'controlling a dying mosquito near a mosquito coil'?

カバー／口絵印刷

とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス） 22

鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

[The Star Of Bethlehem]

The monstrous floating fortress was one part of the plan which the member of the dark side of the Roman Catholic Church, Fiamma of the Right, thought of. Construction materials for the structure were gathered and built from various religious constructions around the world which have ties with the Roman Catholic Church. The finished structure, with a radius exceeding 40 kilometres, would float in the sky at a height of 10000 metres. Inside the fortress, there would be a ceremonial grounds used to help steer at the forefront. In the other areas that act like storage, containers and transportation monorails, amongst other facilities, were considered and prepared for use by humans, as well as for any other possible activities. Around the "Star of Bethlehem", there are fields that have been generated via special techniques. Even at high altitudes, the constructed airspace will not differ much from that of the surface. Originally, a large number of magicians were required in order to move the structure, but autonomous movement was also made to be possible. Therefore, this fortress can only be completed with the presence of its owner, Fiamma.

"More to the right!! A little more!!
Get closer!!"
Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School's Level 5 — Misaka Mikoto
"————!!"
Academy City's Level 0 student — Kamijou Touma
"Maybe we just barely have a means to get out of this."
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator
"M-Mugino.....!"
Former underling of Item — Hamazura Shiage

"I will save this world. You are no longer necessary to do that. You should be honored, you mass of flesh. You managed to carry out your purpose in life."
Final member of the Roman Catholic Church's dark side, "God's Right Seat" — Fiamma of the Right

"Will we make it in time? wonders Misaka with a sigh.
Do your best. Sigh. But when will I get to see him?"

[Sister attached to a Russian Academy City Cooperative Institution — Misaka 10777]

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War Report

Fiamma of the Right's plan had finally truly begun.

He started by gathering the parts he needed from Roman Catholic churches and cathedrals from across the world in order to construct the fortress he needed for his ceremony.

Kamijou Touma was scooped up by the rising fortress and heard his archenemy's voice.

"I suppose I should welcome you to my castle, the Star of Bethlehem."

That fortress was not the only threat.

Fiamma had a further trump card.

"Head out, Archangel Gabriel. Blow them all away."

Hamazura Shiage made it to a field hospital in the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations where the magician Elizalina succeeded in removing as many as possible of the negative effects of the Body Crystal eating into Takitsubo Rikou's body.

However, Hamazura and Takitsubo read the Kremlin Report document that was sent to the Alliance and learned of the Russian military's preparations to carry out a special mission.

It was a manual for the defense of the nuclear launching facilities using a bacteriological weapon. The planned area for that heartless operation was near the village where Digurv and the others lived.

"I didn't get to talk with anyone in that village, but I remember what they did for

me. I want to fight for them, too."

Accelerator was also staying in the Elizalina Alliance, but even with Elizalina's detox techniques, Last Order could not be saved.

To save her, he had to decipher the parchments.

As Accelerator thought that, he had received a warning from Elizalina.

"Run away!! If you do not leave this place now, they will come here. If they seriously invade, we cannot stop them! They are after the parchments you have!!"

The power of an archangel attacked Russia.

However, Misha Kreutzev was not the only being there that could be referred to as an angel.

There had been one more.

Kazakiri Hyouka, the being created scientifically with AIM diffusion fields, had faced the water angel.

"…If you are going to hurt my precious friends for that, then I will use all the power at my disposal to stop you."

In a different place, a different battle was unfolding.

In the Vatican, Matthai Reese, a man who had cast off his position as the pope and had decided to fight as a mere follower of the Christian Church, confronted Cardinal Pietro Yogdis.

"This is a fight to make sure you survive, so make sure not to die before this war is over."

In a Russian palace, Bishop Nikolai Tolstoy had been cast from the plan, so his body trembled in rage.

“Bring out the ‘reserves’. Blow that fortress away!! Now!!”

And Misaka Mikoto, who had arrived in Russia, learned of an independent Russian unit’s movements from a Sister.

“Nu-AD1967. They are preparing a former Soviet Union strategic nuclear warhead, reports Misaka explaining the contents of the transmission.”

Different battles occurred in different places.

They did not know it, but many different people gathered together to defeat the Archangel Misha Kreutzev.

Accelerator cut between Misha and Kazakiri.

Acqua of the Back used their common command over water in order to forcibly strip the archangel’s power by guiding the Telesma making up Misha’s body into his own body.

Kamijou Touma destroyed the ceremony room on the Star of Bethlehem in order to damage the archangel.

As a result…

“…Do you really think it’ll go that easily? Misha is gone. I’m not really sure why things have gone so well, but we humans won against an archangel. The scales have clearly tipped in our favor.”

But it was not over.

Even if he had lost the huge power of the archangel, Fiamma was not mentally shaken in the slightest as he faced off against Kamijou on the Star of Bethlehem.

“Misha Kreutzev’s role ended once the sky had been turned to this night sky I wanted. The first stage is over, but that comes with a nice benefit for me.”

Two right arms were about to clash.

Fiamma of the Right merely spoke.

“Proper power cannot be perfectly used except for in a proper world. Now I will show you what proper power is.”

Chapter 9: The Time When a Huge Distortion Has Been Corrected. *Broken_Right_Hand.*

Part 1

Mugino Shizuri.

The #4 Level 5.

She was a true monster that could freely use the power known as Meltdowner. And she was also Hamazura's archenemy who he had twice defeated in the past. As she had appeared before him after he had fled from Japan's Academy City all the way to Russia, she could be called without exaggeration history's most fearsome hunting dog.

From what Hamazura knew, she had lost one of her arms.

The sleeve of her yellow coat was oddly baggy. It was possible that only the portion past the wrist was made to look human and there was something like a robot arm within the sleeve.

"Hee hee."

There were no words.

As Mugino cast her eyes down, her shoulders moved up and down in an ominous almost mechanical way.

"Heh heh heh. Kah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!!!!!"

“…!!”

When Mugino lifted her head, her tongue was sticking out.

A small case lay on top of that damp piece of red meat. It was a small rectangular case similar to a box of mechanical pencil lead. A white powder was contained within. Hamazura was quite familiar with the substance.

It was Body Crystal.

It was the substance that had made Takitsubo Rikou suffer. The drug(?) purposefully forced an esper’s power out of control. Hamazura and Takitsubo were even then wandering through Russia in order to battle its side effects and Mugino Shizuri had appeared with the root source of it all.

Hamazura completely forgot about the boundaries of Level 0 and Level 5.

He started to wonder where Takitsubo was. Was she okay? Had someone done something horrible to her?

As Hamazura’s head boiled, he spat out some words.

“Are you *still* trying to make Takitsubo use that stupid shit!? And for no rational reason!! Just to make us suffer even a little longer!!!!”

Mugino sneered at his outburst.

She moved her mouth.

However, no response came. This was because she had not moved her mouth in order to speak.

Mugino Shizuri broke the Body Crystal case between her teeth.

Hamazura’s eyes trembled as if he were watching something he truly could not believe.

A crunching sound continued. It was coming from Mugino’s mouth. It was the sound of her chewing on the sharp fragments of the case after having shattered it. Of course, the human mouth was not that tough. Mugino’s mouth had to be

filled with the taste of blood.

And yet that monster's face had nothing but a smile stuck to it.

"…Takitsubo? Why do I have to care about someone as insignificant as that?" Mugino muttered as the sound of fibers tearing could be heard from within her mouth.

She was filling up with something.

A strange cycle began within the girl's body.

"Body Crystal… It purposefully forces an esper's power out of control. Some researcher from 'something or other Rescue' said it was the path to Level 6. Given that she ignored the hopeless response from Tree Diagram and used resonance and Telepaths in a vain struggle to make it work, there must be something more to Body Crystal, but I don't need to think about it that deeply."

Hamazura Shiage had been mistaken.

He had been mistaken about how serious the fact that he had twice defeated the #4 Level 5 was. And he had been mistaken about just how far the strong would go to eliminate a Level 0 once that Level 0 had put himself up on the stage of the strong.

"Hey, Hamazura. If the #4 Level 5's power is forced out of control, how far do you think the damage will spread?"

White beams of light that were much too dreadful shot out.

It wasn't just a few of them.

With the girl named Mugino Shizuri at the center, tens of thousands of beams of light shot out in every direction.

Part 2

Kamijou Touma and Fiamma of the Right stood atop the Star of Bethlehem.

A burning killer intent was emitted from Fiamma in all directions. A strange power gathered around the third arm that was a symbol of that power. It was such an overwhelming power that even Kamijou could sense it despite not knowing the details behind the structure of magic.

Kamijou had no choice but to face that opponent alone. The magician Lessar was not on the Star of Bethlehem and even Sasha Kreutzev who had been with him just moments before had been swallowed up by the cracks in the floor Fiamma had broken causing her to fall to the lower levels of the fortress. There was no one he could rely on.

However, he was not overpowered.

Kamijou tightly clenched his right fist as he faced the enemy before his eyes.

Fiamma rolled a spiritual item in his hand. It was the item controlling Index remotely allowing him to gain the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires.

It was so close Kamijou felt that he could reach it if he just stretched out his hand.

However, the wall of power known as Fiamma would make that much more difficult in reality. Kamijou knew it was a problem that he could not solve by just charging in randomly.

As Kamijou slowly approached, Fiamma laughed.

It was a cruel laugh.

And yet it was the laugh of one who believed that he held no evil in his own actions.

“The Star of Bethlehem has risen and I have used Gabriel to control the heavenly bodies. The four elements have been returned to their rightful positions.”

The noise of something slicing through the air could be heard.

Fiamma had lightly swung his third arm and it glowed palely.

“The preparations are complete. I suppose it’s about time I took that right arm of yours. If I wield the power fixed within me while using your arm as a medium, Project Bethlehem will be complete.”

“…Do you want victory for the Roman Catholic Church that badly?”

Kamijou poured more power into his right fist.

But Fiamma shook his head.

“The Roman Catholic Church does not matter. Well, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t thinking of Christian society in a broader sense, but at the core, my actions are for myself,” Fiamma responded without a moment of silence. “Also, I am not the cause of this war.”

That was not a speech that had been prepared beforehand. It was not something he was reciting from memory. Those core thoughts completely permeated the man known as Fiamma. That was why there was not the slightest pause as he spoke.

“It may be true that I pulled the trigger, but the spiral of anger, resentment, jealousy, and other negative emotions at the base of this war is nothing more than what had already taken root in people all over the world. If not, the flames of war would not have spread in such a short time no matter how violently I had tried to stir up war.”

Fiamma’s words flowed between them.

“I am an indulgence.”

“…”

“As long as they are able to claim they did something because they were ordered

to and not because they truly wanted to, people can let out what lies inside them no matter how inhuman it may be. That is just how ugly the creatures known as humans are."

"Are you trying to say everything you've done is justified because of that?"

"I don't think that's true, but I don't have to," Fiamma said. "I had two purposes in starting World War III. The first was to gather all the materials I needed on the pretext of them being necessary for the war. The second was as a ceremony to draw out the enemy I must defeat."

A light flickered between weak and strong like the pulse of a living creature. It came from the third arm that was the symbol of what made him special.

"Even if you possess a sword with which to slay the lord of the demons, you cannot swing down that sword if the incarnation of evil does not stand before you."

Immediately afterwards, a slicing attack came.

It was a horizontal strike.

Distance did not matter. It did not even fit within the room in the first place. The giant "something" pierced through the walls as it appeared. The instant it was swung, the entire room was sliced apart and the Star of Bethlehem itself had a large piece cut off.

A loud roar resounded after a short delay.

There was a flicker as if from purple electricity.

Kamijou's right hand could not fully negate it. If he had attempted to receive the attack, he would have been blown away as if he were being washed away by a great current. He would have flown a few thousand meters and may have even been slammed to the ground.

But…

"Hohh."

Fiamma smiled.

Kamijou Touma stood within that destroyed room. The boy had realized that he would not be able to negate such a huge attack, so he had used an uppercut-like strike from below the horizontal attack. As a result, the trajectory of Fiamma's attack had been slightly moved upwards causing it to pass by over Kamijou's head.

In other words…

"So you've learned how to turn aside an attack rather than to simply negate it," said Fiamma as if he was impressed.

No one there was able to predict the next attack that came.

Kamijou could not and Fiamma could not.

No one else would have been able to either.

Something twinkled in the heavens spread out above the broken ceiling.

It was a white light.

Immediately after Kamijou's mind interpreted it that way, a giant pure-white pillar of light poured down in a straight line and enveloped Fiamma.

A sound like oil poured on a hot wok reached Kamijou's ears an instant later.

"Wha—!?"

There was an explosion.

A brilliant light as if from welding made Kamijou cover his eyes with his hands. It was so bright he started to get a headache and then he felt his feet float up off the ground. Immediately afterwards, he was knocked back a few meters.

That was nothing more than an aftereffect.

There was such heat that the air exploded and the shockwave that created was enough to blow away a human body.

But…

“An Academy City optical weapon, hm?”

That refreshingly cool voice came from within the explosive beam of light.

Despite supposedly receiving that mysterious attack, Fiamma’s manner of speech did not change in the slightest.

“If I remember correctly, their officially announced number of satellites is four, but from this, it seems I was right in assuming there was something very off about the distribution map of their space forces. Most likely, smaller satellites and space ships are being deployed from a large central station.”

The pure-white light that had shot down from overhead had looked like it had come straight down on Fiamma’s shoulder.

However, it had not.

In reality, the third arm growing from his shoulder was lifted straight up as if it were a giant parasol. It did not allow the falling light to encroach on his position. Fiamma then casually swung his right arm. That was all.

And yet the air shook greatly.

The white light was blown away by his third arm like eraser scraps being flicked away with a finger. That was all. With that, that tremendous light that had been wielded with such fury vanished. Kamijou’s vision was average, so he could not see what was occurring outside the atmosphere, but he knew. Fiamma, the man who stood before his eyes, had shot down the satellite with that simple motion.

“It’s nothing to be surprised about.” Fiamma of the Right swayed his third arm back and forth. “In fact, I’m rather embarrassed that I had to show off my right arm in such an incomplete state.”

“You…”

“Did you forget what I announced back in the Elizalina Alliance? My right arm responds to the need, matches to the level of trials and tribulations, and uses the most suitable output. Whether it is an optical weapon or whatever else, nothing

can stand up to me.”

(This isn’t normal.)

It was beyond playing rock-paper-scissors against someone who got to choose after you had shown your hand. Simply put, Fiamma was almighty. Whether you used rock, paper, or scissors, Fiamma would just use “win”. It did not matter what shape his fingers made. At the point that he made the challenge, he had already won.

That was why Fiamma did not need the things that were usually necessary.

Speed.

Toughness.

Intelligence.

Physical strength.

Space between him and his opponent.

Numbers.

A weapon.

Fiamma could bring an end to the fight by merely holding out his hand, so he did not need any of the usual cards that would lead to a tiny victory when used together. He needed to do only one thing to win. He would swing his right hand and it was all over. That was all there was to it. It seemed he had been limited in the number of times he could use it before, but he had overcome that by compensating with the knowledge he received from Index. Now, Fiamma could win as many times as he wanted.

His victories were only personal victories, so they may have been different from political victories. That was why he had needed the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, but in the current situation, Fiamma simply had too much of an advantage.

How was Kamijou supposed to fight an opponent like that?

Standing on the same stage as someone and having a definite means of defeating them were two different things.

“But you should be proud,” said Fiamma cheerfully with his much too strange-looking right arm.

He was not enjoying fighting Kamijou.

He was merely enjoying obtaining the item he wanted.

“As expected of the right arm I had my eyes on. It seems my right arm cannot decide what level of output to use against that fist.”

A horizontal attack came.

Of course, Kamijou’s right arm could not receive it. Fiamma’s arm was not that simple. Kamijou stuck his right hand forward. At the point where he was on the border of touching Fiamma’s third arm, he twisted the trajectory of his hand so that his palm slid along Fiamma’s arm and then forced his own body to skid to the side.

A tremendous tension ate into his entire body and it felt like it was shortening his lifespan.

However, Kamijou’s right hand was clearly not normal either by the mere fact that he was able to challenge Fiamma’s right arm.

“…!!”

Even after doing all that, Kamijou was unable to counterattack Fiamma.

Fiamma’s body had already disappeared.

Fiamma could not move up or down, but he could travel any distance if it was perfectly level. He had fallen back 3000 meters at once and was now standing atop a different building on the Star of Bethlehem.

At the same time, he fired his next attack.

The remote control spiritual item in Fiamma’s hand fired a beam of light.

“Warning: Chapter 22, Verse 1. Seven seconds until the complete activation of the spell named Eli Eli Lema Sabachthani.”

A blood red beam of light surged out.

The pillar of light was fired from the magic circle that had appeared before Fiamma and it headed straight for Kamijou who stood in the distance ahead of him.

An odd feeling ran up Kamijou’s spine.

He had no memory of it, but an intense feeling of rejection came from something like instinct.

“…!?”

He immediately held out his right hand and an intense pressure that felt like it would break his fingers met it.

He could not blow the entire thing away.

(He’s…!!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth.

(He’s not just relying on his right arm!? With all that, does he really not see it as anything more than awkward and incomplete!?)

And then…

“As a pure spell, it really does have its disadvantages.”

The voice came from directly behind him, but he did not have the leeway needed to turn around. Fiamma was already there. The third arm was holding a giant sword made of light. He swung the sword horizontally aiming for Kamijou’s neck.

Kamijou’s Imagine Breaker could not deal with simultaneous attacks from multiple directions.

It was difficult to negate both at once and those attacks were on a level where

even one of them would be enough to crush him.

But Kamijou did not have any leeway in his options.

The blood red beam of light was even then about to crush his body and the sword was accurately closing in to decapitate him from behind.

“Ooooohhhhhhhhh!!” Kamijou yelled and turned his body while keeping his right hand in front of him.

Keeping his right hand in the center, he moved his legs so he was at a 90 degree angle with the Eli Eli Lema Sabachthani beam.

And then he removed his right hand from the beam of light.

He altered the location of his right hand so it was just barely grazing the beam rather than receiving it straight on.

Immediately afterwards, the red beam’s trajectory was forcefully distorted.

It was similar to purposefully missing the center of a bowling pin with the ball in order to knock it to the side. With the beam’s route changed, it flowed diagonally behind Kamijou.

It headed straight for Fiamma who was trying to decapitate him.

(Ye—)

Kamijou turned around when he heard the explosive noise, but his eyes opened wide before he could check on the result.

Fiamma of the Right ignored the approaching red beam of light and swung his third arm horizontally. The sword of light blew away the red beam in one strike and continued to slice through the air toward Kamijou.

He did not have time to bring up his right hand.

Nor did he have time to use his feet to evade.

“!!”

As if he were sweeping his own feet out from under him, Kamijou unhesitatingly threw himself to the floor. The large sword passed above him immediately afterwards. He could tell that it sliced straight through the wall of the fortress. An explosive noise struck Kamijou's body like a shockwave.

Fiamma smiled thinly.

With the sword still held out, he played with the remote control spiritual item in his hand.

"Consecutive long distance attacks lose accuracy. I confirmed that in the Elizalina Alliance."

An unnatural red light palely glowed from the remote control spiritual item.

"Warning: Chapter 29, Verse 33. Seven seconds until complete activation of the Scarlet Stone of Pexjarva."

(Wha—!?)

In shock, Kamijou pressed the bottom of his shoes against the ground in order to stand up and move to his next course of action.

Immediately afterwards, an intense pain crawled up from his toes, to his ankle, his shin, and his knee. The pain was similar to that of having the joints forcibly moved. Something invisible seemed to move along the floor and crawl into his body through his leg.

"Kh…Gaaaahhhh!!"

Kamijou struck his clenched fist against his own thigh.

The intense pain being transmitted from his foot suddenly disappeared.

Kamijou was kneeling on one knee, but Fiamma did not stop there.

"Warning: Chapter 35, Verse 18. Five seconds until complete activation of Sulfur Rain will Scorch the Earth."

Orange arrow-like objects that held a scorching heat rained down.

It was not just a few.

Almost 50 arrows appeared from near the ceiling and fell down toward Kamijou like a hanging ceiling.

(He's using both his abilities as a member of God's Right Seat and his knowledge from Index one after another…!?)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and swung his right arm while still collapsed on the ground.

A few of the arrows turned to orange sparks and were blown away into something like spray. The minute particles were struck by the other arrows that were still targeting him which caused meaningless explosions in midair.

Even then, not all of them had been taken out.

Orange arrows pierced into the floor right next to the boy and the stone shattered. The sharp fragments struck Kamijou's body as he moved backwards and then stood up on his feet.

Kamijou Touma and Fiamma of the Right.

They glared at each other through a white smokescreen.

"Not good. This was no time for a rehearsal, but I need to be aware of the errors between the theory and reality. It would be almost rude if I was in this state when the enemy I must defeat was dragged out."

The room and the fortress itself had been sliced in two, so there was a cliff into the sky just in front of Kamijou.

On the other side of the rift making up the cliff, he could see white clouds and the great land of Russia.

One wrong step would send him tumbling off to his death at an altitude of 10,000 meters, but neither Kamijou nor Fiamma took their eyes off the other.

The movements of Fiamma's limbs were not as fast as Kanzaki's or Acqua's. They moved at the speed of a normal person like Kamijou and yet he could

smash a mountain and split the earth. That sense of unbalance was very strange.

Kamijou Touma was well aware of how fearsome an opponent he was up against, but his lips still moved.

“The enemy you must defeat?”

“Yes. I’m not after anything ridiculous. I don’t want world domination or the extinction of mankind or anything along those lines. In fact, you could say that I am in the position farthest away from that kind of ‘transformation’. After all, my goal is to have what should be flowing as it should be.”

There was a clear disparity between that statement and the things he had said before.

However, what he said next made the danger in what he said quite clear.

“This world is distorted.”

That blunt statement was enough to express the chill within Fiamma.

“With the misalignment of the four great elements and the dripping mass of negativity that is fueling World War III at the base, everything is distorted. There is not just one or two causes. All sorts of problems are spewing forth. It is as if the world itself is deteriorating. God is said to have created a perfect system and to have laid out all the gears to turn in the proper way, so why has everything become distorted so easily? …The answer is simple. A few of the gears have reached their limit.”

So he would return them to normal.

It was a simple goal to put in words.

But when one thought about how many sacrifices Fiamma had forced on other people, it seemed doubtful the process he was using was a good one.

“It is necessary to switch out the gears and in some places, it is necessary to install new mechanisms. I suppose it’s similar to how the internal wiring needs to be worked on a little bit when repairing an old house. And bringing all the ill will to the surface with World War III could be said to be nothing more than

removing dust clogging things up.” Fiamma spoke as if what he was saying was not important at all. “After washing away all the dirt on the gears, Christian model lubricant will be reapplied so that they will regain their light movements. I suppose that’s a good enough metaphor for it all. I think my method is fairly discreet when compared to Noah’s ark. …and even after washing the world with a great flood, the ill will stuck there remained in the world afterwards.”

“…Lubricant?” Kamijou muttered as he glared at Fiamma. “Are you saying you’re going to use some kind magic that rearranges people’s hearts to your convenience like the Croce di Pietro during the Daihaseisai?”

“It’s nothing that complex. I’ll show you. That would be the best way to get it across. Oh, if I just swing my perfect arm just once, it will show you more than you ever wanted to know just how much of a gap there is between our abilities. Now then, I wonder how frightened humanity will have to get before they will realize the truth. When will they realize that what I am doing is the same as the legends of divine punishment in which lightning strikes those who break the norm, so they will get to see the moment at which I save everyone in the world as long as they obey. And when will they realize that the moment the Star of Bethlehem shines in the night sky, a new age will have begun.”

In the end, was Fiamma of the Right really a follower of the Christian Church?

Or did he feel that human hands “fixing” the distorted gears that God had created would be the ultimate blasphemy?

But that was not what caught Kamijou’s attention.

“You say you’re going to save everyone in the world?”

Fiamma would cover the entire world in only the blessings that fit into the limits of what he could imagine.

He saw no value in anything else.

In a way, a world like that would be a utopia.

The earth would be a planet where everything but blessings had been annihilated.

“Have you truly looked around at every single part of the world? Have you seen how many people there are smiling?”

“I see. You hold an interesting view.” Fiamma grinned. “But let’s think about that after I’ve saved the world.”

Immediately afterwards, the giant sword soared from directly below to directly above.

It passed up under Kamijou’s right armpit and headed right toward his shoulder.

He had no time to evade or even to turn aside the strike.

With an unbelievably soft noise, Kamijou Touma’s right arm was severed at the shoulder.

Part 3

Accelerator had succeeded in defeating the water angel.

He was breathing erratically. Despite manipulating the vectors, his legs were trembling from exhaustion as he stood atop the snow.

He had surely had some success.

The water angel’s explosion had been contained to a minimum.

Normally, everything would have been annihilated to the point of not even leaving dust behind for hundreds of kilometers, but he had managed to protect the land of Russia and the people who lived there.

And yet Accelerator thought his heart was going to stop.

A car was stopped in front of him as if it had struck a wall of snow. It was the car Misaka Worst had been driving and that Last Order had been within. It was clearly not in good shape. The front was greatly dented in and the windshield was shattered.

All the trees in the area had been knocked over in the same direction.

It was the aftereffect of Accelerator's battle.

Last Order and Misaka Worst had been hit full on by that shockwave.

"…"

Accelerator bent over and almost sank into the snow.

He no longer knew what he had been fighting for.

Misaka Worst and Last Order were lying limply within the car. They had clearly taken serious damage. Especially Last Order. She had already been pressured from within due to the effect of Aiwass's appearance and now external damage had been added on top of that. He was afraid to even imagine how dangerous a situation her body was in.

Could he do anything?

He still did not know how to use the parchments. The war had been endlessly harsh. Amid all the fighting, Last Order and Misaka Worst had become quite battered. Would Last Order's body last until he could find a clue that would lead him to a way to resolve it all?

"…You might be able to do something," said a voice.

It was a frail female voice.

"You also have someone you want to rescue with your own hands, right? I am technically not human, but I understand how humans think."

Accelerator felt cornered and so his eyes held more hostility than necessary. When he turned around, he found the scientific angel there. Her body was oddly transparent.

“I may be able to entrust my goal to someone like you. I have expended too much. My existence will not disappear, but it will be difficult for me to appear in the physical world for a while.”

“What are you saying? What do you mean I might be able to do something!?”

“September 30th.”

Accelerator’s eyes opened wide at that date spoken by the scientific angel.

That was the day Last Order had been abducted by Kihara Amata. To Accelerator, that date held more meaning to his life than any other.

“My friend named Index…removed the virus from that girl’s head by singing her a special song.”

And then she mentioned Index.

That was the keyword that both Aiwass and that Level 0 had mentioned.

He could no longer ignore what she was saying. Accelerator’s focus turned toward the scientific angel as if it were being sucked in toward her.

Yet the scientific angel’s silhouette was losing focus as if she were the flame of a candle that was about to go out.

“…The contents of the song…are within my head…because I was linked…with the virus. The original was…meant to…deal…with me, so…it may not work…for that monster…that is derived from me…but if you…change the…para…meters of…the song…”

(Song? Is it some methodology about stimulating the senses in order to control someone’s mental state? If I directly operate on the brain like when I dealt with Amai’s virus…)

She was disappearing.

It was too late.

There was not time for her to explain about the song in detail.

“…Don’t…worry…”

The scientific angel placed her finger on her temple.

Her fingertip had almost completely disappeared.

“That girl…was the one healed…by the…song…so it has been…recorded within…her head…” Her timid smile blurred. “As for…the parame…ters, you kno-”

She disappeared.

She was no longer visible.

He could no longer hear her voice.

“…”

Accelerator hit the switch for his electrode and checked on the surrounding vectors. The AIM diffusion fields filling the area similarly to in Academy City were completely gone. That scientific angel had disappeared…or rather had been forcibly returned to Academy City.

He thought for a bit.

He called out toward the driver seat of wrecked car.

He called out toward Misaka Worst.

“…Are you alive?”

“Unfortunately. Misaka thought for a bit about just comfortably pretending to be dead.”

The girl raised her head and then moved out onto the snow with a surprisingly nimble motion. Accelerator showed no real sign that he cared.

“Then you heard all that.”

“The data on the song used to eliminate the virus from Last Order still remains within her memories,” responded Misaka Worst in an offhand kind of way. “It

seems that data might be useful in healing her if you could extract it. Wow, so Academy City's #1 can steal people's memories by reading the vectors of the electrical signals in their brain. Amazing."

"…My vector transformation power can only detect the presence or absence of an electrical signal. In other words, I can only extract a string of zeros and ones. I have no way of knowing what memory that belongs to, so I can't replay the memories or anything. Can anyone hear the music on a CD in their head just by looking at the surface of the CD? It's the same as that."

"Then what'll you do?"

"I'll use your power," responded Accelerator immediately. "You're from the Sisters series as well, so you should be able to directly access the huge information source of the Misaka Network."

"Last Order is the highest unit. A Misaka who has nothing but normal access privileges can't look into the control tower's head. If I could do that, I could have manipulated Last Order into attacking you."

"You don't need to access this brat here. She has a habit of sharing her memories with the other Sisters to make a backup. In other words, there's a good chance you can access the data on the song as long as you can access the other Sisters through the network."

"How careless of her. If you matched the timing with which the control tower made contact with the backup, you would have a chance to embed malicious data within the control tower."

"Yeah, but it seems that carelessness is normally referred to as trust," spat out Accelerator. "And thanks to that, we just barely have a means out of this."

"Keh keh. But even if you get the song, you can't use it as is. Where are you planning on obtaining the parameters for altering it?"

"I know where."

Accelerator reached for his pocket.

The parchments were there.

They could not be explained by science.

But couldn't the same thing be said of that monster in Academy City named Aiwass? Even if the being was based on AIM diffusion fields, could it really be called "scientific"? When he thought of the being as existing outside a certain set of rules, it suddenly made sense how Accelerator was so easily defeated despite supposedly being the #1.

In that case…

"I may be able to find the parameters by looking in these. If I put together Academy City and the other type of techniques that exists outside of it, it may lead to a way to resolve this."

Part 4

Mugino Shizuri "exploded".

White light shot out in all directions with her at the center.

The overwhelming flood of light wiped away the supernatural phenomena of the eerie night sky that ignored the time of day and the strange points of light glowing in 4 different colors. In the same way the lights of a city made the stars disappear, Mugino Shizuri's power showed itself in Russia as a symbol of the negative side of science.

The raging beams of light finally focused together into one spot. It was a single arm. It was a construction almost 20 meters long. Hamazura looked up at it and almost felt a sense of majesty from it, but the arm of light then swung down above him like a collapsing building.

“…!!!???”

He frantically jumped to the side.

The Meltdowner arm did not just melt through the thick snow. It melted the earth below the snow as well.

An explosive noise rang out.

Hamazura’s large body was blown over 10 meters away. He tried to yell out in fear, but his mouth refused to move. He realized he was losing moisture.

As he forced his stuck throat to move and sucked in air, Hamazura thought.

He had not been directly hit.

If he had, he would have been blown to pieces.

(A phreatic explosion…!!)

He felt a stinging pain over his entire upper body and his entire backbone creaked, but he did not have time to complain about the pain.

The next strike was coming.

One small piece of luck amid all the misfortune was that Mugino could not aim carefully after sending herself out of control.

However, the misfortune greatly outweighed the luck.

He could no longer see Mugino Shizuri.

Her beam arm had come undone and she was firing tens of thousands of beams in every direction again. However, it was not just for an instant. Like a saber from a robot anime, she was perpetually firing the beams. The girl’s silhouette was blotted out. The intense dancing light burned afterimages into Hamazura’s vision preventing him from seeing anything else. The swirl of beams of light gave him a sharp headache and he merely lay on the ground. Mugino’s attack could fuse steel instantly, so it was nothing short of a miracle that Hamazura’s body was not sliced in two.

He could not approach her.

Approaching would bring him nothing but death.

In all of their battles up to that point, Mugino's Meltdowner had been overwhelming. After all, she could freely fire beams that could pierce through any cover and straight through her opponent's body. Letting her hear the slightest breath would bring death. That was how fearsome an opponent she was.

But this was different.

It was very different.

It was now the same as a blast furnace or the sun. He could no longer hold his breath and approach from a blind spot or use a mental opening to get an attack in. He had no chance left. The light was simply too great. Just by approaching, the human body would suffer a fatal wound. Needless to say, touching her was out of the question.

And…

"…Haamazuraa…"

Amid the explosive din, he could still hear that cracking voice. He could tell the voice was getting closer. Yes, it was getting closer. Even while Mugino Shizuri "exploded" like that, she was slowly approaching. That blasting furnace that could burn away a human body just by approaching was walking toward him like death incarnate.

That was Body Crystal.

That was Meltdowner.

The power had been devilishly powerful to begin with and it had now been given an even more destructive effects with a drug(?). Having become hell on earth, Mugino Shizuri fully represented all that.

"…I have abandoned everything," said a nightmarish voice.

The tone of voice alone squeezed that tiny boy's heart.

“I knew what would happen if I used Body Crystal, but I made sure to abandon it all, Hamazura. It cost me everything to be standing here now, so it isn’t right for you to be unscathed, is it? …Don’t tell me you thought you could leave this place without abandoning anything...!”

Was she even human?

That was what Hamazura honestly thought. Not a single fragment remained of the vague idea of opposing powerful espers he had held during his Skill-Out days. They were insane. They just lived in too different a world. They were supposed to have been racing toward a cliff in a game of chicken, but Mugino Shizuri had flapped the wings on her back to fly beyond the edge of the cliff. Even using a machine against a monster like that would just lead him straight to the bottom of the cliff.

He couldn’t win.

There was no way.

He was on his hands and knees atop the snow and he could not move.

It would not mean anything to that monster if he pulled the trigger of his assault rifle and shot every bullet he had. There was no opening. There was no blind spot. How was he supposed to hurt a Level 5 who was perpetually firing deadly attacks 360 degrees around her?

“…Hamazura…”

Death called his name.

Death approached him.

“Hamazura.”

Turning his back would mean nothing. Any distance he could make on foot through that snow would mean nothing if Mugino just focused on her attack a little. And if he hid behind a tree, she would just blow straight through the trunk.

Even if he ran, he would be killed.

But standing to oppose her would just shorten his life.

In that case…

(What the hell am I supposed to do…!!!???)

“Haamazuraaaaaa!!!!!”

She yelled.

The whiteness that had blotted out his vision suddenly disappeared. No. The attack being fired in all directions collected in one place. It collected in one place in order to pierce through Hamazura Shiage. It was solely to open a giant hole in the body of her target.

Trying to run away was useless.

That deadly attack would pierce through any type of cover.

(I’m dead….!?)

Hamazura’s breathing stopped yet his arms still shot up. Without checking whether the safety was on or not, he aimed the barrel of the assault rifle at Mugino. In the off chance that it would increase Takitsubo Rikou’s odds of survival by 1% or even 0.1%, Hamazura started to pull the trigger.

And then Mugino Shizuri’s yell spread out explosively.

“Aaaaahhhhhhhhh!!”

Suddenly, all light disappeared.

Mugino Shizuri’s body fell down into the snow.

“Hah…?”

Hamazura could not understand the scene before his eyes.

He had not yet pulled the trigger. No third party had suddenly appeared and attacked Mugino. No one had done anything and yet Mugino had lost all power and collapsed like a marionette that’s strings had been cut.

Hamazura was not in a position where he could wonder what had happened.

(Was I…saved…?)

That was all he could think.

And then he realized something.

Mugino Shizuri's body was trembling as she sank into the snow. Her face that had been stripped of its special makeup was sweating much more than one would expect in the freezing cold of Russia. Her complexion looked like that of someone with a high fever. Hamazura knew what was happening. He had seen a similar condition on the girl who had been with him the entire time.

It was the Body Crystal.

It had originally been developed to purposefully send an esper's power out of control. In extremely rare cases that state would strengthen an esper's power, so it was supplied to espers like Takitsubo, but it was not something an esper with no aptitude for it should take.

Mugino Shizuri did not have the special characteristics needed.

Takitsubo had the disposition for it, but the Body Crystal still gradually ate into her body. It was obvious how much damage would be done to someone who did not have the disposition like Mugino if they used it anyway.

Mugino Shizuri had gone that far.

Her powers as the #4 were not enough. In order to defeat Hamazura Shiage who had defeated her twice, she did not care what happened to her body. That was what Mugino had been thinking when she used the Body Crystal.

(…So it was all she could do to keep standing.)

It was not something a Level 0 like Hamazura could understand.

If there was something that could strengthen one's powers so easily and with no risk, no one would be working so hard.

“Why…?”

Something squirmed about in the snow.

That was what the once leader of Item had been reduced to.

“Why, goddammit!! Goddammit, goddammit, goddammit!!!! The Body Crystal…Where did the Body Crystal go? Just a bit more…just 10 more seconds and it would have all been over!!”

“…”

Hamazura knew the situation and his hands trembled. The barrel of his assault rifle shook unreliably. He could feel that Mugino was wide open as she struggled within the snow.

He could kill her.

If he killed her there, Takitsubo and he would no longer be targeted.

His finger on the trigger cramped up.

But…

Was it really okay to kill her?

Who was it who had regretted the fight with Mugino Shizuri just before he came to Russia?

Hamazura looked down at Mugino again.

She had been the most glamorous of the girls that made up Item. Her taste in clothing had not been bad. Her limbs were long and slender and all of her movements had held a certain elegance. Hamazura had been nothing but a subordinate, so he had never learned of her personal history, but he guessed that she was some kind of rich girl.

And yet…

“Hamazuraaaaaa!! Don’t fucking look down on me! You alone…You alone I will kill with my own hands no matter what!! It all fell apart there. It all fell

apart when you shot me in that ethanol plant!! If I don’t crush you, the anger in my head will not go away!!”

Mugino was incredibly battered. She had lost an arm and an eye. She had horrible burns on her face. And that was only on the outside. Hamazura had no way of knowing what was going on inside her. Were her organs really in the correct places? Did she even have all her organs? Did she have anything else stuck in there with her organs? He did not even know the answers to those questions. What had happened to her while he wasn’t looking? It was not normal for her to have gotten back up after those injuries each time. He could not even imagine what kind of grotesque technology had been put inside her to support that abnormality.

And it all led to the Body Crystal.

She was a shadow of her former self. Her body lacked its core. It felt like just poking at her with your finger would result in your finger sinking into her skin like it was rotten jelly. It was odd that she had been standing before. She was a tool that the darkness of Academy City had completely used up.

"…*Why did I turn into such a horrible monster?"*

Wasn’t that what Mugino Shizuri had said in District 23? When he had heard her say that, what was it he had thought? When he had fled Academy City, hadn’t he felt like saying goodbye to all the back alley fights?

“Mugino…”

If he killed her there, would anything really change?

Hadn’t he come to Russia because he was sick of all the bloodshed caused by the darkness of Academy City?

“Muginoooo!!”

The next thing he knew, he was rushing over to her. He had thrown the assault rifle aside. He did not need it.

Mugino had been such a powerful wall blocking his way, but no more attacks would be coming from her. She could do nothing but tremble in the snow.

Hamazura approached Mugino, crouched down, wrapped his arms around her back, and helped her stand up.

They naturally ended up in a position similar to an embrace and his hands felt both a soft feminine sensation and an odd rough hard feeling.

At first Hamazura assumed she had something hidden in her coat, but he realized that wasn't so.

There was something in her body.

Mugino's expression did not change. To her it may have been so normal that she saw no need to discuss it. She looked at Hamazura's shocked face and moved her trembling lips.

"…What are you…doing…?"

"I've had enough," Hamazura said spitting out his true feelings. "Why do we have to fight like this!? Even the fight between Item and School that led to all this was a problem that the adults in Academy City should have settled!! Their desires created that city's darkness. Why do we have to do all this to clean up after them!?"

"…"

"You, Takitsubo, Kinuhata, and even Frenda got along so well!! I don't know too much about the times when the four of you were together, but I'm sure you were all watching out for each other since long before I started working under Item!! Why? Why did it have to end up like this!? It isn't just because your short temper led to you killing Frenda. If the higher ups of Academy City truly held even that conflict in their hands, then wasn't Item set up to lose to School regardless of how the small battles turned out!? Weren't we cornered and forced to fight each other to the death!?"

The higher ups who manipulated people's fates like they were gods may have predicted that very conversation. They may have been relaxing in some dark room and laughing at the words he was saying.

"Hey, if you want to see me be pathetic, I'll let you as many times as you want. I'll bow down to you as long as it takes, I'll lick your shoes until you're

satisfied, and I'll set fire to my bankbook with a lighter. If that kind of thing will stop this fighting, I'll do anything."

As he spewed out what he truly felt deep in his heart, Hamazura slowly became aware of who his true enemy was. It was not a monster like Mugino. It was the people who had turned a girl into that monster.

He was not going to let anyone say it was society or the environment she lived in. A calamity on that level did not occur naturally. That was just how much of nightmare she was.

But what if there was someone who had rearranged the surroundings of the delinquents and espers in the back alleys in order to create that tragedy for their own benefit?

Would that person not be an even greater mass of evil than a mere monster?

"So let's stop this."

There was no reason to fight.

If they continued to take each other's lives, the only ones who would gain from it were the VIPs who polished their claws in an unreachable place. Why did that war of washing away blood with blood have to continue just so those people could increase the number of jewels and paintings they owned? Why did a single girl have to be turned into a monster and why did he have to call her a monster and point a gun at her?

That was why Hamazura said what he did.

Hamazura finally completely broke free of the mental chains binding him to the great darkness within Academy City and he spoke like a completely normal human being.

"Let's stop killing."

For a while, Mugino Shizuri remained silent.

Her sworn enemy was practically embracing her and she would normally have been able to kill her target instantly without moving a finger at that range, but

that Level 5 monster leaned on that Level 0 boy.

Finally, she opened her mouth.

She shook her head.

“…What are you saying, Hamazura…?”

She seemed to be squeezing out her words.

She sounded like her heart had been shattered and she was now exposing what had been within.

“You chose Takitsubo, right? You shot me twice in order to save her. How can you now say you’re going to save me…?”

“Yes…” Hamazura nodded and his voice sounded like a groan. “Yes!! I chose Takitsubo! I swore I would risk my life to protect her!! That hasn’t changed!! I can’t change my decision now and choose you!! That hasn’t changed. I abandoned you to protect Takitsubo!!”

Hamazura had said he would do any pathetic thing as long as it would stop the fighting. He understood the gravity of the violence he had wielded. When Mugino realized that, the edges of her lips loosened so subtly that it would have been easy to miss.

Her body was incredibly beaten up.

She had not just lost an eye and an arm. Her insides were so messed up that the eye and the arm were no real problem. She had undergone the strange medical treatments of Academy City and the Body Crystal had wreaked its havoc all through her body. Mugino thought back on her tragic state and then muttered a few words.

“…You selfish bastard.”

“I know. I’m probably the worst person in Academy City.”

“I killed Frenda. I tore Item apart. I tried to take Takitsubo’s life and not just once. How do you plan to save someone who has done all that?”

“I’m not saying you’ll get off easy. And neither will I.”

“…?”

“So you need to apologize to Kinuhata, bow down to Takitsubo, and go crying to Frenda’s grave in order to beg for forgiveness. Once you do that…”

Hamazura trailed off there.

That Level 0 delinquent used his insufficient intellect to search for the proper words.

“Once you do that, we will become Item once more. We will!!”

She made no objections.

Mugino Shizuri’s thoughts completely stopped before she could.

In that silence, only Hamazura’s words continued.

“And until then, I will protect you! I will risk my life in order for you, Takitsubo, and Kinuhata to return to Item!! So stand up, Mugino. Please, stand up on your own two legs just once more!! Break the twisted mental chains known as your pride that Academy City created!!”

“You, a Level 0, are saying you’ll protect me, a Level 5…?”

Mugino Shizuri grinned.

It was the same smile as when she, Kinuhata Saiai, Frenda, and Takitsubo Rikou had held their strategy meetings in that family restaurant.

“What a joke. Don’t look down on me like that.”

She brushed aside Hamazura’s hand and slowly stood atop the snow. Her body wobbled. She held out a hand to stop Hamazura who was desperately trying to support her and used her chin to point toward the creepy night sky made up of points of four different colors.

An Academy City supersonic bomber was passing by overhead.

Three masses rained down in a straight line along the path of the bomber.

A horrible sound hurt Hamazura's ears. It was coming from the radio the Russian soldier had dropped. Someone was jamming it so that not even the smallest piece of the inhuman things about to occur would leak out.

Hamazura felt a terribly unpleasant feeling like he was touching some terrible slime.

He detected the same "smell" as when he had faced off against the privateers. Despite it having been an Academy City weapon, the impression he got was the exact opposite from the monstrous aircraft that had repelled the Russian special unit. This one was not the kind type of opponent that had destroyed the steam dispenser.

This one was definitely there to kill him.

That was its only objective.

Hamazura's instincts told him that much.

Mugino started muttering as she stared up at the creepy night sky.

"…It seems I was always expendable. They have concluded that the trash I am broke down before it had destroyed everything. Their secondary plan is coming down. What will you do, Hamazura?"

"Didn't I already tell you?" Hamazura picked up the assault rifle he had cast aside before. "I said I would risk my life so that everyone would return to Item."

"…Heh. You've got guts," Mugino muttered under her breath so that it did not reach Hamazura.

Meanwhile, Hamazura looked around the area. There would be a bit of a time lag before the Academy City assassins completed their descent. In that time, he had to find Takitsubo who he had lost track of during the avalanche. Once he did, he had to come up with a plan to fight back against the Academy City assassins who were heading down to attack them from the night sky.

He did not have much time.

A darkness that was enough to replace Mugino Shizuri approached as if to swallow up Hamazura and the others.

Part 5

In the underground portion of St. George's Cathedral, Index's attacks were relentless.

She had immediately seen through the fact that Stiyl Magnus had made the three flame giants into a single set in order to create a Trinity construction that would lower the burden. In order to destroy that construction, she had focused her attacks on a single Innocentius.

By having three Innocentii, Stiyl's burden was lessened, but they had now been reduced to two, so they lost stability and he was forced to bear the full brunt of the burden once more.

However, he could not stop fighting.

He did not have time to rest.

Index's fierce attacks making full use of the 103,000 grimoires did not give him a chance.

Different types of objects coiled about.

There was the glow of the magic circles in her emotionless eyes, the red wings growing from her limp back that seemed to have lost its core, and the numerous Western swords created from collections of something like particles of light that floated around her. They all functioned to thoroughly annihilate her enemy and their current target was Stiyl Magnus.

"Kh…!!"

Even then, the red blood wings were swung about again and again and the long narrow swords made of particles of light stabbed in from various angles. The swords were not held in Index's hands. They floated about her. Stiyl was reminded of the sword held by the harvest god Freyr that would automatically fight and automatically kill the enemy.

(Angel wings and the harvest god's sword…!! She's matching my combination of Christianity and Norse mythology!!)

Within Norse mythology, there was no legend in which that sword lost. Even in the final battle of Ragnarok, Freyr only lost because he had left the sword with someone else before the war began, so a means of defeating that sword was not recorded anywhere.

Even Odin and Thor were defeated along with their weapons, but that sword alone was undefeated.

Innocentius alone was not going to be enough.

The giants would be quickly worn down and would be annihilated without being able to recover.

If that happened, who would stop Index?

How would he save her?

Thinking that, Stiyl unhesitatingly created a flame sword and put himself between Index and the Innocentii.

Because there were two of the flame giants, they could not gain time to recover.

Index's rush of attacks gave them no chance to do so and they lost momentum.

In that case, he needed to use other means of fighting to make up for that.

If he could buy them time to recover, he could complete a rotation.

He let fly multiple slashes of the flame sword and the blood wings and giant's arms swung around. Stiyl felt even more pressure inside his body and he sweated profusely. His flame sword was not perfect. At times he received Index's attack

on it and it was sliced apart. At those times, he twisted his body at the last second and just barely managed to continue fighting.

But he was up against John's Pen mode that had been created to annihilate anyone who was trying to steal the 103,000 grimoires whether it was a single person or an entire cabal. The mere fact that Stiyl Magnus was managing to deal with her on his own was abnormal.

Just saying that Stiyl had grown was not enough to explain it.

Index was clearly in bad form.

(The burden from the remote control spiritual item is holding her back.)

While managing to singlehandedly cut through the 103,000 grimoires, Stiyl did not overestimate his own abilities.

(That unnecessary interruption into her consciousness is lowering her accuracy and speed. If she was the same as she was when she fought that right hand, this kind of trick wouldn't work.)

But he was not thankful.

If that burden were not there, she would not be suffering.

Stiyl stepped forward.

There was an instant of an opening.

If he detonated the flame sword there, he could knock her unconscious. Even if she was a great magical existence, her body was still that of a delicate girl. If she was hit by the shockwave, she should no longer be able to function. And then he could place the additional rune card on her in order to mentally bind her.

Then it would be over.

And yet Stiyl's mind caught at the last second.

Even if he was doing this to protect her…

Even if he had been forced into this battle against his will by the remote control

spiritual item…

He had hurt her quite a bit up until then.

Could Stiyl Magnus's magic name allow him to hurt her any more than that?

He shouldn't have thought that.

He had used up time that he shouldn't have.

And…

"Chapter 32, Verse 44. Preparing for a counterattack," said the ruthless voice of the girl he was supposed to protect.

Between the lines 6

Stealing an Academy City tank had been simple.

Mikoto was at the top when it came to espers who manipulated electricity. Despite the tank running mainly on a diesel engine, most of it ran through electronics. As someone who could directly hack without using cables, that weapon had been no match for Mikoto.

There were powered suits and the like that used chemical springs that moved using chemicals and were protected by armor that thoroughly repelled all electromagnetic waves as a defense against electricity espers, but that tank had not seemed to have anything like that equipped on it.

She had stopped the engine from a distance, unlocked the hatch, and kicked out those aboard.

They had tried to report the incident, but Mikoto had interfered with their radio transmission as well. She had done the same for the photographing from UAVs and the radar that was monitoring the situation. She had separated the tank from the war front, so no one would notice.

“Hmm. Tanks move surprisingly quickly,” muttered Mikoto from within the tank that the Sister was operating.

“Modern tanks possess the output needed to run without issue on highways, but it is only Academy City technology that allows this one to move at 150 kph on a snowy path like this, says Misaka giving an arbitrary report.”

“Well, these masses of iron cost 7 billion each, so they need to be at least this useful.”

“Original, they are made of composite materials, corrects Misaka. The main guns of recent tanks can fire at about Mach 4.5, says Misaka as she idly adds on to her previous report. That is a greater output than your Railgun, onee-sama.”

“It isn’t all about the speed, you know?”

She only went by that name because it symbolized her electric powers. Her pride was not condensed into that one attack. In fact, she found her true worth in hitting her enemy with multiple attacks from multiple angles.

(…And that’s why that idiot especially gets on my nerves by negating my attacks no matter what I throw at him.)

“Misaka apologizes for interrupting you while you mumble to yourself, but…”

“Nyahh!?”

“It appears the independent unit preparing the Nu-AD1967 nuclear warheads has spotted us, reports Misaka.”

Heading there as quickly as possible may have backfired. The unit may have seen the snow tossed up by the treads through a night vision scope.

Something was fired from the distance.

The only thing in Mikoto's mind was the nuclear warheads, so a chill ran down her spine, but it seemed that was not what it was. The missile was too small and there were too many of them.

"They appear to be surface-to-surface missiles used for bombings, reports Misaka. There are 30 to 40 of them."

"Nyah ha."

"You appear to becoming more cat-like, so how about it? asks Misaka suggesting a course of action."

"Of course."

Mikoto reached for the hatch above her head.

She opened the circular hatch that was like a small manhole and raised her upper body out.

"This is my area of expertise, so leave it to me!!"

As she yelled, sparks flew from her bangs.

She did not fire a lightning spear. She sent an enormous amount of electromagnetic waves to the area ahead of her. She was interfering with the radar that the missiles used to search for the enemy while heading through the air at twice the speed of sound.

The missiles immediately lost their target and dropped down in odd directions.

Numerous explosions rang out and a shockwave struck Mikoto's cheek like a slap even though she was not directly hit. She ignored it and stared ahead.

"Full speed ahead!! If we fall back, it'll just give them time to prepare the next barrage! Let's take care of this all at once!!"

"M-Misa…"

"?"

"Misa…Severe….kami…obstruction of the signal…sakami…the network…

sakamisaka…cut off…kamisa….attempting to restore….kamisaka…”

“Wah wah wah!! What’s with you!? Hah? You just now realized you have a vulnerability to jamming with a large output by an esper with the same type of power?”

The Sister was trembling in the driver seat as if in a trance and Mikoto hurriedly stopped sending out the jamming electromagnetic waves.

“Heh…The mass produced models really cannot stand up to the Original, says Misaka as she reassesses her own position with some self derision.”

Of course, ending the jamming meant the enemy’s bombings would begin anew.

“Let’s just charge in!!” Mikoto yelled. “Once we get close enough, they won’t be able to carry out large scale bombings in fear of getting caught in the blast themselves!!”

The diesel engine let out a roar as if in response. They were only 2 kilometers away from where the surface-to-surface missiles were being fired.

The independent unit seemed to have given up on the bombings, but they had brought out a tank unit that had been hidden behind a hill. Even if they were prepared to be hit a few times, they would be completely blown away if dozens of tanks focused their fire on them.

“By Misaka’s estimations, we will be hit by the blasts 20 times before we can travel 500 meters, says Misa—”

“Then we’ll finish this before that!!”

A black shadow squirmed around Mikoto’s tank.

No.

It was a large amount of iron sand that had been sleeping below the snow. She thoroughly gathered it from approximately 200 meters around her and brought it together using magnetism.

It must have looked like a wall to her enemies.

That wall of despair was like a giant tsunami about to strike the land.

That was the #3 Level 5.

She was not just a cannon.

There were only two people she knew who she could not handle even with skillful application of her power. Those two were the espers who stood at the extremes. One at the extreme of justice and one at the extreme of evil.

“Gooooo!!”

As she yelled, the huge mass of iron sand passed by overhead and crashed into the enemy forces ahead. Like an undulating tsunami or like a living snake, that mountain of iron sand swept across while vibrating at high speed. The independent Russian unit was unable to deal with it.

Of course they weren’t.

No matter how many times they shot it, the swirling iron sand did not slow down in the slightest.

The tank being controlled by the Sister leisurely drove into the center of the confused enemy lines. Mikoto pulled herself out of the hatch completely and looked forward.

There was a large truck-like vehicle in the very center of the enemy lines. It had over 20 tires and it was larger than a train car. It had a long tube loaded on the back. That object that was standing up vertically on hydraulic cylinders was most likely the missile loaded with a Nu-AD1967.

As if to speed up the situation, there were flames firing from the back of it.

Mikoto jumped from the tank that was skidding to the side atop the snow.

(Whether that's an ICBM or a strategic nuclear warhead with the outer shell swapped out, it is still electronically controlled. A lighting spear will make it useless.)

She did not use her Railgun because she wanted to avoid letting the nuclear materials leak out. Only destroying the control circuits was the safest course of action.

Just as the arm holding the missile in place was about to let go, Mikoto focused on her bangs while in midair.

As bluish-white sparks shot out, she yelled with every last bit of strength she had left.

"…I'll blow you away!!"

Chapter 10: Completion of the Final Spell's Preliminary Preparations. *Rebirth_the*...

Part 1

Sasha Kreutzev ran through the Star of Bethlehem.

The Star of Bethlehem was a temple on a scale never seen before in the history of the Christian Church. However, the inside was wrapped in silence to terrifying extent. She had not seen a single warrior priest. She felt as if a deep part of Fiamma of the Right was carved into that dark silence. On a fundamental level, that man did not trust in what were known as comrades. That was why he had made that structure.

Fiamma's attack had caused her to split up with the boy who was apparently a student from Academy City.

She should really go help him out, but she had been made aware of how little a chance she had against Fiamma back in the Elizalina Alliance. That man was a monster. He had almost surpassed the laws of magic.

However, things were different if Fiamma of the Right was not the only opponent.

(My personal opinion: This temple and the altered night sky are deeply related to Project Bethlehem and it is highly likely that Fiamma is magically linked to the Star of Bethlehem in order to control it.)

While keeping a cautious eye on her surroundings, Sasha ran down the passageway at high speed.

(A supplementary explanation: Even if I cannot stand up to Fiamma, I may be able to get an indirect attack in via the Star of Bethlehem.)

At any rate, she had to hurry.

She did not know the details of who that boy was, but it had not seemed like he knew much about magic. In that case he was someone who should be protected by the Russian Orthodox Church that was supposed to inspect and eliminate the occult. Just by the fact that she was using that amateur to buy her some time against that monster, she felt the need to voluntarily punish herself.

(But where exactly am I supposed attack!? The Star of Bethlehem is a large-scale temple with a radius of over 40 kilometers. It could take quite a bit of time just to find a point to target!!)

As Sasha grew impatient, an odd voice came from behind a pillar.

“Tah dah! Tah dah! Tah dahhh!!”

“!?”

Sasha’s body stiffened like a surprised cat’s and she pulled an L-shaped crowbar from the belt at her waist. However, the end of the mass of steel did not strike the speaker when she swung it like a Japanese iai strike.

There was a steel glove.

A spiritual item that was made of mechanical parts combined to look a bit like an arm struck the crowbar modified for torture and sparks flew through the air.

Holding the steel glove was a girl wearing what looked like a lacrosse uniform with a jacket over it. From the back of her miniskirt, an artificial tail could be seen swaying back and forth.

“Ahh. I’m glad I managed to use my steel glove to grab onto the outer wall of the Star of Bethlehem when it started rising. I tried to construct a communications line with Bayloupe and the others who are on the surface, but this fortress’s protection is tougher than I expected, so I couldn’t open a hole to get through. Right now, I’m trying to force as much of the technology in this fortress into my head as I can for the sake of the UK. I was doing it as I searched

for that important boy who I lost track of."

The black-haired girl did not seem to mind having been attacked by the crowbar.

"Are you from the Russian Orthodox Church? You seemed troubled, so I came over to explain the payment plan to you. I recommend the stopover course. It's quite cheap right now."

"…?"

Sasha looked confused and the black-haired girl skillfully moved her tail to point in a certain direction. She pointed to the bottom of the temple where a great number of square containers were hanging down.

"They're something like emergency escape devices. They're kind of like a mix between a bus and a parachute. It seemed like the Russian Orthodox magicians might try to resist Fiamma to stop his plan from being completed, but then he would just throw them out, so I led them here before that could happen. Heh heh."

"…My first question: What do you mean by payment plan?"

"Oh, I'm not really going to be taking money. Everything I do is for the sake of the UK. I'll help you out here if you swear to help us out if the UK is ever in trouble later," said the black-haired girl with a huge grin on her face.

With the tail stretching from within her miniskirt, she gave the impression of a demon, but the different details were sweet and cute. She was like a mischievous little demon. Sasha wondered what the girl intended to make her do with that verbal promise.

However, Sasha did not especially care about the UK, so she didn't ask.

"My first response: Make sure everyone who wishes to leave the warfront escapes. A supplementary explanation: I do not intend to leave yet. I must at least get one strike back at Fiamma of the Right."

"Eh heh heh. Understood. Don't forget that I will have you repay for this favor later either officially or unofficially."

With a loud clunk, the containers suspended from the bottom of the temple flew out into the night sky. The flames of war were blazing on the surface, but there was no need to worry about that. They were professional Russian Orthodox magicians.

The black-haired girl lightly waved her tail.

“So how do you plan to strike back at Fiamma?”

“My second response: I feel no need to answer your question.”

“You kind of piss me off. Would you like some gum?”

Sasha’s face darkened behind her bangs.

“…My third response: I do not understand why people put that mass of synthetic compounds into their mouths.”

“Ever since the manna in the New Testament, Christians have always been reputed to love sweet things.”

Sasha ignored the black-haired girl following her and ran further into the Star of Bethlehem. She did not have a complete grasp of the construction of the temple, but she had an idea where the device she was headed for was.

She was headed for the device that connected Fiamma of the Right to the temple.

Assuming the Star of Bethlehem functioned on the idea of a “temple” from Christian-based magic both old and modern and both Eastern and Western, then the number, colors, and arrangement of the parts constructing the temple should be the same regardless of its size.

Basically, he had gathered the best materials from all across the world and increased the scale by quite a bit, but he was still using the same basic recipe. In that case, there was no need to be fooled by its showiness or size. The knowledge within the magician known as Sasha Kreutzev was enough.

Suddenly, Sasha stopped running. She was not at some important part of the temple her knowledge told her about. Sasha was looking out a window. Through it, she could see a dark night sky spreading out and another building.

The building's walls and ceiling had been mostly destroyed, so she could see inside it from where she stood.

Fiamma of the Right had swung a giant sword that blotted out the night sky beyond it.

And Sasha saw the right arm of the boy facing Fiamma being cleanly severed at the shoulder.

Part 2

Vasilisa, the woman who led the special Russian Orthodox unit known as Annihilatus arrived at Moscow. Crimson stains deepened the red of her religious habit. The drawn-back edges of her lips had a similarly-colored liquid on them.

However, not all of that was her own blood.

Vasilisa also had red stains underneath her fingernails on both hands and she used those hands to throw open the main doors to a large palace. A number of assassins immediately attacked her, but she paid them no heed. She paid no heed to their strength or to the fact that they had once been her allies.

She blew them all away.

"Old cannibal woman of the one-legged house…" sang a young girl's voice.

Along with Vasilisa's voice, an old woman wearing torn shadows wielded great power within the palace. A giant mass of flames exploded and the professional magicians were thrown about on the floor and they let out cries and shouts.

When she reached the depths of the temple, a deep male voice came from in

front of her.

“So you’ve come.”

The voice sounded annoyed.

A middle aged man stood there wearing an expensive bishop-class outfit.

“You’ve fallen in love with that cannibalistic monster, you damn witch. And you have that unaging body from going to the ends of crushing the occult.”

“I’d rather you called me a fairy tale heroine, Bishop Nikolai. I am a national idol, you know?”

“Shut up. You’re just the ruins of a girl from a fairy tale who obtained happiness by burning her mother and sister to death.”

Vasilisa ignored him.

She glanced over and the monstrous shadow moved in response. It charged straight for Nikolai.

Nikolai opened his mouth to speak while watching the witch approach.

“Cannibal witches are quite famous. They are just that strong. Russia has quite a bit of folklore regarding them, but they almost always fall into one of two patterns. Either the human is eaten by the witch or the witch lets the human go. The humans almost never win.”

With a great noise, the cannibal witch exploded.

“By the way, there is an exceptional way to kill even a cannibal witch.”

At the same time, something swirled around Nikolai. It was a clear liquid. However, it was not a normal liquid. When it appeared, holes started burning in the carpet decorating the floor.

“In one story containing a cannibal witch, the witch is in charge of two fountains. One contains the Water of Life that gives one eternal life. The other contains the Water of Death that ends one’s life. The knights asked the witch to

lead them to the Water of Life and they managed to monopolize the Water of Life by pushing the witch into the Water of Death."

The cannibal witch was sucked into the clear liquid and then disappeared. Nikolai then snapped his fingers. The water headed for Vasilisa like a tsunami and submerged her up to the head.

"That was an exceedingly rare victory at the hands of a human."

A cruel scene was spread out before Nikolai.

The left half of Vasilisa's body was completely gone. Her arm was nothing but bone, her feminine silhouette had crumbled from her chest to her stomach, and the psychedelically colored insides were about to spill out. And Vasilisa was continuing to come apart. In less than a minute, she would likely not a have a single hair left on her head.

"This war is Russia's war. The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch, personally signed this national policy into being," said Nikolai as if he were spitting out the words. "I don't know what you're thinking, but surely you know what it means to try to stop it."

But then the bishop frowned.

Something was wrong.

Expressions of pain or fear did not appear on Vasilisa's face even after half of her body had been disintegrated. She still had that smile that left one wondering what she was thinking.

And then her lips moved despite the fact that she should have already lost her lungs.

"Oh, dear. Signatures that are obtained through tricks are usually considered to be invalid."

The instant Nikolai took a step back, Vasilisa's wounds swelled up. With an odd noise, the portions that had been disintegrated burst from the areas they had been disintegrated from.

“The document related to the war used the military command format instead of the Russian Orthodox command format. And the Patriarch is not used to giving orders over the network. …I wonder if it is possible that someone had him electronically sign a random dummy document on a tablet and then attached the handwriting data to a more dangerous document? Not that I hate pure children or anything.”

Despite having been produced in such a strange way, the new parts of her body were young and full of life. The skin looked soft, water resistant, and like that of someone in their early teens.

It looked just like the skin of a fairy tale heroine.

“And the only person who could have used a trick like that would be the person appointed to be the pipeline between the church and the military. That’s you, Bishop Nikolai Tolstoy. You are certainly the most suspicious, but I wonder what you were after. Was it the position of Patriarch? So were you thinking of having him assassinated during all the turmoil?”

“How?”

Nikolai stared at that oddly white and shining skin as if he couldn’t believe it.

“My Water of Death was perfect!! I created that spiritual item from materials I had found and sent to me from the backcountry!! It was purposefully made to deal with your witch!! You’re the Vasilisa who is under the care of that witch, so there should have been no way for you to defend against the Water of Death!!”

“Nikolai, Nikolai. Did you forget what you yourself said?”

Vasilisa had parts of her skin that looked different from others like she was a reptile that had shed only half its skin. She shook her head with a smile on her face.

“You said the cannibal witch was in charge of both the Water of Life and the Water of Death.”

“You don’t mean…”

“Of course I do. The core of that story was the item to obtain eternal life. The

means of killing the witch was nothing more than a small tool to give it a happy ending. My body is not something as ridiculous as immortal, but we don't need to argue over which item is more important and which is stronger, do we?"

That meant the card Nikolai held could not kill Vasilisa. He possessed other excellent pieces of equipment besides the Water of Death, but she would continue toward him even if he tore her to pieces with them.

And Vasilisa was not the type of magician that would allow Nikolai to flee.

"Old cannibal woman of the one-legged house."

As that fairy tale heroine approached him with a smile, her lovely singing voice resounded throughout the palace.

"Please lend your strength to this honest and powerless girl. Lend me your overwhelming witch's power so that I can smash this dishonest and ugly adult to pieces and have a happy ending."

Part 3

Kamijou Touma's right arm spun through the air with a line of blood drawn behind it. That narrow red line made loops creating a strange form of art.

Fiamma of the Right lightly held out his hand.

It grabbed Kamijou's right arm as if absorbing it.

That right arm was known as Imagine Breaker.

That unique right hand could negate any unexplainable supernatural power be it scientific or magical.

“I have it…”

Fiamma’s lips twisted in delight.

With a sound like a water balloon bursting, the severed right hand burst to pieces and the blood, flesh, bone, blood vessels, and nerves all neatly disassembled and spread out.

“The world environment has been prepared using the Star of Bethlehem and the right hand to act as a medium has been severed. The power that resides within me cannot show off 100% of its power except by way of your right hand. Imagine Breaker must be a type of purification tool the holy right hand naturally possesses, but to me it is no more than a mouse eating away at food stores. However, taking that unneeded ability into my power as one of the original pieces ends its role. …With this, my right hand is complete. If I wield the power that should originally have been within me at its full output, the salvation of all will be complete. After all, my arm possesses the power to save the entire world. People may refer to that as being The One Above God, but… I do not particularly care about that. I do not intend to match or exceed him. I only intend to gather all the power I have now and to save the world with it.”

All the parts were absorbed into the third arm stretching from Fiamma of the Right’s right shoulder.

He was in anguish.

Normally, his face did not lose its composure, but his eyebrows twisted in displeasure just slightly.

The flesh and blood that had been put together was perfect, but the power of Imagine Breaker treated Fiamma of the Right as a special case and started to eat away at his very core.

However, it was worth mentioning that he did not immediately lose his power.

In other words, the power sleeping within Fiamma was constantly creating such great power that Imagine Breaker’s effects were not enough to negate it.

(All this could not have been carried out with clever tricks, so it seems luck and true skill were on my side. And if it did not have this level of output, it would

not be known as the power that the Son of God should wield.)

Fiamma of the Right's body shook.

Not only his heart constricted and retracted. Centered around his third arm, his entire body did as well. It was a reaction to the power stored at his center travelling to his right arm of flesh and blood.

A great change occurred as if to prove that the power to change the world had descended.

However, this change was not in Fiamma's body.

It was in the planet that received him.

The heavens greatly opened up.

That clear otherworldly and artificially arranged night sky of red, blue, yellow, and green split open. Like an old stocking ripping, large cracks appeared in places and they spread soundlessly.

On the other side was a golden light.

It was just like a legend. It was just like the world seen in religious art. That lowering curtain of light looked like a scene of the heavens and the earth being connected. Someone who did not know the circumstances would likely have mistaken it for an angel above the clouds about to spill out. In reality, God and the angels were not at a physical height. They were on the other side of some invisible phase like infrared rays or ultraviolet rays. However, that mistaken impression may not have been too far off in a way. That golden light was a massive amount of Telesma.

Fiamma had not called in an angel.

It may have been more accurate to say he had called in the world where angels were.

Fiamma of the Right had not pitifully knocked on the door again and again and then waited for the heavy door to open. He had only transformed the place at which he stood into an appropriate place.

When a certain Christian holy woman was forcibly thrown into a brothel, that brothel had turned into a shining place for sermons. It was the same as that.

When a different holy woman was thrown into a cold and dirty prison while injured, the entire space had overflowed with the shining power of the angels making it like a pure spring and the woman's injuries were kindly healed. It was the same as that.

(It has been dyed by heaven.)

The area around the proper ones would be dyed in the proper manner.

Fiamma of the Right's lips twisted in pleasure upon confirming that truth.

(Once I rearrange the depths of the earth, all the gears will have been readjusted and the devices will have been set to keep them running smoothly. Then this world will once again be moving as it should be.)

That meant that he no longer needed the boy who had lost his right arm.

That mass of flesh that had been nothing more than an adapter to keep that right arm in the world needed to be quickly disposed of.

(*I will save this world*. You are no longer necessary to do that.)

Fiamma thrust his third arm that now clearly had a physical form toward the boy who still had great amounts of blood gushing from his shoulder.

"You should be honored, you mass of flesh. You managed to carry out your purpose in life."

That would settle it.

His third arm was no longer incomplete and it no longer continued to shake awkwardly.

The destruction he could carry out was different from the destruction that could be created by the 103,000 grimoires.

He held the power to save the world.

He held the power at the core of a legend.

He was known as The One Above God.

If it was necessary, he could easily smash the no longer needed adaptor with an overwhelming explosion of light that could turn an entire planet to dust.

It would have been odd if he could not.

"…?"

In that instant, what Fiamma of the Right felt first was not anger or fear. It was doubt.

There was not a scratch on the boy who should have been turned to ash.

In fact, the great swirl of light Fiamma had fired had split in two right in front of the boy and scattered to either side of him. Yet that attack had held such power that it could blow away a planet or recreate any of the legends in Christianity.

It was almost like…

It was almost like it had been blown away by an invisible right hand stretching from the wound on the boy's shoulder.

"What…?" Fiamma of the Right said still not having grasped what had happened.

He could not stop the words spilling from his own mouth. They grew and grew like a snowball rolling down a slope.

"I took your right hand. So *why do you still have that power*!?"

No response came.

The boy merely hung his head down while his cheek was wet with his own blood.

An invisible power gathered.

It gathered in that right arm that should not exist. It gathered beyond that wound.

(…)

Fiamma moved only his eyeballs to look at what was growing from his own right shoulder.

He had indeed taken in that boy's right hand and that hand that he had made his own flesh and blood still possessed Imagine Breaker, the unique power to negate all supernatural powers.

Then what was the power gathering inside the enemy before Fiamma's eyes?

(Something…)

Fiamma felt his lips quickly drying up. He had finally acquired the right arm of Imagine Breaker. He had made all sorts of major preparations in order to obtain that strange right hand that acted as the final key. As long as he had his own power and that boy's right arm that had been disassembled and reorganized into a spiritual item, he could save the entire world. He had obtained something with that much value and yet…

He was inferior.

He was overshadowed.

The great swirl of power compressing toward that boy's shoulder felt so threatening that it seemed to suck the color out of everything Fiamma had obtained.

(Something invisible…)

Fiamma of the Right looked back at the boy's face.

He was still hanging his head down so his expression could not be seen.

It seemed that not just Imagine Breaker resided in that boy's body. Just the ability to negate supernatural powers was not enough to shake Fiamma's heart that greatly and to put him on his guard to that extent. Even then, he felt a painful illusion on his skin. He felt a deeply resounding shock in the bottom of his gut like large fireworks were going off nearby. That shock was similar to an invisible wall.

(Something is there!!)

“…”

The boy, Kamijou Touma, slowly raised his head.

It was not some great action. There was no great speed to it. There was no special regularity to it.

He merely raised his head.

That was all.

Fiamma of the Right felt the muscles from his shoulder to the back of his neck stiffening.

It was coming.

He did not know what, but something he needed to be cautious of was coming.

And…

Kamijou Touma used his own power to crush that invisible something.

A different power appeared above that great power that had gathered around Kamijou’s shoulder. That other power seemed to open up a large mouth and swallow up the first power. As if this giant mouth was chewing, the air around the shoulder shook looked like sugar water.

That great power was smashed in an instant.

“...You,” muttered Kamijou as his lips moved. “I don’t know who you are.”

His words were not especially loud.

And yet they still stabbed into the depths of Fiamma’s ears. His heart uncontrollably went on such high guard that he felt like overlooking a single twitch of a finger or blink of an eye could have a major effect on the outcome of the battle.

“And I don’t know what you’re trying to do.”

Kamijou *was not* looking at Fiamma of the Right, the possessor of the greatest power even among God's Right Seat.

Fiamma did not know what he was speaking to.

"But…"

That may have been something only Kamijou Touma could understand.

At any rate, he continued to speak.

"…*You stay silent. I'll take care of this.*"

Fiamma heard a damp noise and the next thing he knew, a right arm had already extended from Kamijou Touma's shoulder. He had eaten away such a massive power and then grown a new part of his body.

(He…threw it away…?)

Fiamma tried to mutter those words, but he realized afterwards that he had not said them out loud.

His throat dried and a feeling like something was clinging there remained.

(He gave up all that power to get Imagine Breaker back…?)

He looked up to the boy's right arm that he had taken for himself.

Even then, Fiamma had the Imagine Breaker arm inside his body after having disassembled it. However, he could tell the shining power was gradually fading from the flesh and blood he had acquired. It was such a unique power that two of it could not exist within the same world. The scene made Fiamma think that such a rule must exist. And that rule might also have been that the true power could only reside within the right arm if it was attached to the boy known as Kamijou Touma.

He could not allow himself to lose it.

He did not miss the power of Imagine Breaker in and of itself. In fact, he had been planning to eventually eliminate the functionality of the arm he had taken

into this body. It did nothing but interfere with the power within Fiamma's body. However, if the right arm itself continued to rapidly deteriorate, it may continue on to the point of losing its ability to receive Fiamma's power. That would be a problem for his goal.

"…I've finally begun to figure this out," said Kamijou.

"Figure what out?"

"I thought your plan seemed incredibly over the top. You created this Star of Bethlehem, you started World War III, you created an alliance between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, and you did so much more."

Kamijou stopped breathing for an instant.

The next words he spoke were in the form of a question to Fiamma.

"Why did the Star of Bethlehem have to be this huge? This is a ceremonial space in order for you to safely and surely carry out your magic, but if you truly were the strongest existence out there, would there have been any reason for you to tear pieces from churches and temples from around the world and gather them together?"

Kamijou spoke as if he were checking items off of a list one by one.

"Why did you start World War III? You said it was to gather the necessary items from around the world and to make the enemy you must defeat clear. However, it can be explained in a different way. Your power automatically regulates the strength of your arm's power matching it to the level of difficulty of your enemy. In other words, the stronger the enemy that stands before you, the stronger the power you can draw out. …But why did you have to forcibly draw out such great power?"

And each of the things on that list accurately scraped away at Fiamma making what was inside clear.

"And why did you make an alliance between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church? Why did you want military strength to the point of contacting another denomination beyond the Roman Catholic Church and its

2 billion followers? If you were truly invincible and you could truly defeat any and all enemies, you would have had no need to prepare subordinates."

Kamijou Touma continued to speak those words that were fatal to Fiamma of the Right.

"In other words…you were afraid, weren't you?"

Kamijou glared straight at Fiamma as he spoke those words.

"You didn't know if your body truly held enough power to save the world."

An explosion of light shot out.

The sharp claws of Fiamma of the Right's third arm stretched out and a tremendous attack was fired from the tips toward Kamijou Touma.

But Kamijou was not blown to pieces.

The right palm he held out in front of himself pressed against that storm of light. He twisted his wrist so that the vector of the attack was forced diagonally to the back.

He was completely unscathed.

That could be said to be a result fitting of the power that could kill any and all illusions.

And his words did not stop.

When you thought about it, it was obvious.

It was completely natural that Fiamma of the Right did not have any proof of it.

After all…

"The world has never ended," said Kamijou. "I don't know about the legends of ancient times, but at the very least, I have never heard any modern stories of the world being on the verge of being destroyed just like in the legends."

His words searched for an opening through which to cut into the impregnable

Fiamma.

“And if you have never prevented a threat that could end the world, you have never been blessed with a chance to draw out power great enough to save the world. It’s the same as how my Imagine Breaker doesn’t look like it has any power unless I’m surrounded by espers or magicians.”

In other words, the reason that Fiamma of the Right had put together all sorts of smaller plans to create the overblown plan he was carrying out, was actually quite simple.

“Someone who has never saved the world has no way of knowing if they have the power to save the world.”

“…”

Fiamma of the Right remained silent for a bit.

Finally, his shoulders started to shake.

The man who ruled over red, the right, fire, and Michael was laughing quietly.

“…So what?” were the words that leaked from his mouth.

Something like an unknown form of malice overflowed from the mouth of the man who had caused disturbances across the world and who completely grasped the flow of those disturbances in his hands.

“That does not apply only to me. If you live on this planet and have continued to survive without dying, then you have not experienced destruction on a legendary scale. Are you trying to say you have the right to blame me? Are you saying you have experienced the power needed to save the world?”

“Of course I have,” Kamijou Touma replied instantly.

That response shattered Fiamma’s expectations.

“It wasn’t on the level of all humanity living on this planet and it may have looked insignificant when viewed from a satellite or something else looking down on the planet, but I have saved it. It may be insignificant or whatever, but I

have seen the instant at which one person's 'world' is saved."

Yes.

He had been wrapped up in incidents time after time. He had desperately clenched his fist because he did not want to see the people he knew covered in blood before his eyes. He was constantly being taken to the hospital, his right arm had been severed, and his memoires cut out partway, so he could not even remember it all.

He had gotten almost nothing in return. He was aware that it was not enough to make it worth it. If he had been stronger, he may have been able to solve things in a smarter way. If he had been cleverer, he might have been able to obtain more.

But that was why he knew he had obtained something.

Kamijou Touma knew that the things he had desperately grabbed with his clumsy hands were not worthless.

If Fiamma had not been trapped within the giant concept of "the world" and he had reached his hand out to the people before him, he would not have had to be afraid of feeling a power great enough to save the world. Even without his overblown plan, without his large scale temple, without his special nature, and without his strange right arm, he would not have felt doubts about it.

But he had not done that.

That was why he could not see it at all.

"Someone who says he will save the world cannot protect the world."

It was obvious.

If Kamijou had acted based on that idea, he would have lost everything.

Below the golden heavens, Kamijou Touma spoke to that isolated man who had never obtained anything and who had never even stretched out his hand.

"Our world is not so weak that it needs to be saved by a bastard like that."

Between the lines 7

Mikoto stared straight ahead.

The night sky had started emitting a strange golden light, but she had no time to worry about that odd weather. If there was anyone who could think about that kind of thing when they were on the verge of a nuclear explosion occurring or not, that person deserved to be in the Guinness Book of Records.

"…"

The flames spewing from the bottom of the ballistic missile with the Nu-AD1967 had disappeared. The large missile could not stay vertical for long with the arm about to let go of it, so it slowly but surely tilted. After reaching a certain point, it fell over toward the ground like a tree felled by a lumberjack.

The missile could no longer be fired.

Mikoto sighed slightly and then looked around.

Black smoke was rising from the tanks and armored vehicles of the independent unit. They had been sliced cleanly apart by the friction of the iron sand that was vibrating at high speed and could stand up to the assault rifles and handguns the unit had been armed with. Given the destruction, it was odd that no one had died.

"…Well, I guess that's that," Mikoto said arbitrarily before looking for the Sister.

The Sister poked just her head out of the hatch of the tank sitting in the middle of the enemy lines.

"You managed to singlehandedly defeat a company of troops 200 strong. Seeing that, it seems to be giving Misaka a complex, says Misaka as she feels a bit

downhearted.”

“What are you saying? Your strength is on a scale close to 10,000 when you’re all together. And you have your powers, your network, and you even have Academy City’s cutting edge tactics inputted into you. These guys are nothing compared to you.”

The Sister mumbled something about wanting that much individuality, but then her eyebrows twitched and she put her hand to her headset.

“What? Are you intercepting another Russian military transmission?”

“…They seem to be confused over being unable to contact the man who seems to be behind this, Nikolai Tolstoy, reports Misaka with a serious expression.”

“You always have the same expression. So this guy ended up destroying himself? Or maybe an Academy City unit did it.”

“The details are unknown, but the unit seems split on whether to continue the mission or not, adds Misaka.”

“There’s another unit? But if the boss character was taken out already…”

“It seems they have decided to continue, concludes Misaka.”

“Ah, dammit! Why are they so fired up over this!?” Sparks flew in all directions from Mikoto. “Okay! Where’s the next unit!? Don’t tell me they can fire Nu-AD1967s from multiple places at once!!”

“From the contents of the transmission, it seems they cannot do that, says Misaka denying that possibility. The remaining independent unit has only 10 commissioned officers that can fight directly. It seems that Nu-AD1967 collapsed there is the only one they are able to use, says Misaka while listening to the transmission.”

Even if they had multiple warheads or missiles, it seemed there were a few processes that had to be carried out before firing such as the arrangement of related vehicles and regulating the electrical foundation for controlling it. Mikoto had just previously defeated the people with the skills needed to do that. The commissioned officers remaining could not set up a missile or transport a

warhead.

“But that missile fell over, so they can’t use it, right?”

“They have not realized that fact, so they are attempting to forcibly send out the signal to fire it remotely, says Misaka in shock.”

Mikoto blinked.

“That means…”

“Even if they send the signal out over the emergency remote, the missile will not fire, but the warhead may detonate here, says Misaka expressing her own prediction.”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!!”

Mikoto frantically looked over at the collapsed missile.

“We’ll die! If that happens, we’ll definitely die!! You said they were sending out a remote signal, right!? So if I use my power to jam the signal…!!”

“It is an optical transmission that uses infrared, so your electromagnetic jamming will not work, warns Misaka.”

“Gwahh!! C’mon! What is it, a TV remote!?”

Mikoto doubted the radioactivity would leak out so easily, but she timidly headed around the nuclear missile examining it. The missile itself was over 20 meters long.

“Maybe the circuits for receiving the transmission shorted out from my lightning spear…”

“The main circuitry is protected within thick lead and reinforced glass, reports Misaka. And ICBMs are made so they will not have errors even while cutting through cumulonimbus clouds, so they are made to be resistant to high voltage electrical currents, says Misaka announcing the obvious. The missile likely stopped before because the system in the launch vehicle was fried.”

“If it uses infrared, then there must be a sensor to detect it. We should be able to block the signal by covering it in cloth!”

“Will we make it in time? wonders Misaka with a sigh. Do your best. Sigh. But when will I get to see him?”

“You sure are calm!!”

Chapter 11: In the Shining Golden Sky. *Star_of_ Bethlehem.*

Part 1

An intense pressure assaulted Accelerator's chest.

His breathing stopped.

He did not know how it worked, but a portion of the night sky had split open greatly and a great amount of golden light was overflowing from it. Given the refractive index of sunlight and the atmosphere, the heavens were filled with a color that should have been impossible upon the earth. That light expelled all sense of night from the world. The fortress monopolizing the heavens was even more clearly visible than when it had been dyed in the colors of night before.

The night sky from before had been strange enough given the time.

That eerie night sky had seemed like it had been pasted there by human hands and the layout of the stars had been impossible from an astronomical point of view.

But…

That golden sky was beyond even that. It seemed like it would be wrong to even attempt to explain it astronomically. One could only imagine that scientists across the world would just give up saying that there was no way common knowledge could explain it even though it was before their eyes.

Everything had gone insane.

It wasn't just the fact that the scene ignored all the basic scientific laws. It was

the fact that no one was hiding the phenomenon. It was completely insane that it was just spread out before the entire world like that.

Accelerator was used to the darkness of Academy City where it was natural for all sorts of incidents and the esper powers that had caused them to be covered up using cutting edge technology, so that sight seemed completely ridiculous to him.

In that second, in that instant, what was known as the world may have completely changed.

But…

(…What do I care?)

With that one thought, Accelerator cast aside that great change.

He seemed to be grabbing at his own chest with his slender hand as he breathed heavily.

Even then, Last Order's life was in danger.

If he did not get rid of the cause as soon as possible, it would go beyond the point of no return.

He knew it was selfish.

But even so he did not care about a change that encompassed the entire world. If anyone would say that was self-centered and evil, that strongest monster of Academy City was prepared to fight every single one of them. No matter who he had to make an enemy of and no matter what he had to lose, there was something he had to accomplish.

He had to rescue the girl known as Last Order from every part of that unreasonable world.

Accelerator once more had a reason to live.

"Misaka Worst. Have you gotten the data on the song used to remove Kihara Amata's virus?"

“It is in a rather shallow portion of the Misaka Network. It seems the single large will of the network had noticed something wrong with the song. The calculation ability of each Sister was reorganized and used in parallel to continually attempt to analyze it. Thanks to that, this newcomer Misaka was able to acquire the data without having to dive too deeply into the network. Misaka has finished downloading it,” Misaka Worst said while pointing toward her own temple with a mischievous smile on her face.

“Give me the data,” Accelerator said without thanking her.

“At least say something. A pointlessly vast knowledge is the reward of intellectual work, y’know? Although it’s kind of like a drink after working overtime.”

She sighed and then pulled a mobile device from a pocket of her white battle outfit.

“Misaka has the song, but she cannot express it with her specs. It has less to do with how you have to move your throat and more to do with the manner of breathing and how you make it reverberate within your body not being normal. It would be faster to output it by sending electrical signals to a speaker. Would you like the score, artificial voice data, or the sound amplitude graph?”

“Give me all of them. Only a lowly thug holds back. Having good manners with small things like that won’t get you any praise, but acting tough and then failing is a waste of your achievements.”

“You really are an unpleasant person through and through, but it is more comfortable that way.”

With a slight noise of static, a change suddenly occurred on the mobile device. A few files were added.

Accelerator took the mobile device and operated the screen with his fingertips. Misaka Worst peered at the small screen from the side.

“But just this song isn’t enough, right? You have to replace the exclusive parameters or whatever. How are you going to do that?”

“I’ll manage somehow,” replied Accelerator as he shook the mobile device

around to drive the girl away as her head was blocking his view.

He then pulled out the pile of parchments.

Written with a sticky black ink were eerie and strange spells or magic circles. Misaka Worst frowned upon seeing the cryptic contents of the parchments. They simply seemed unfitting for the crystallization of Academy City's cutting edge science that Last Order was.

"…Are you mocking Misaka?"

"I'm glad to see you can express your emotions so abundantly, but I'd rather the other dolls didn't learn from you."

"Quit talking like you're a parent. So this clearly occult demon summoning text is hiding the parameter you need? Are you going to become a shady spiritual expert after studying for twenty minutes and then call a goat's head from a pentagram to grant your wish?"

"No."

"By the way," Misaka Worst said without listening to him and with clear ill will covering her words. "Last Order's problem was caused by something within Academy City, right? So why was the manual to fixing that problem plopped down in front of you in such a far off place? You just happened to go to Russia and yet you just happened to run into an adaptable means of fixing this? It's like a video game where hints are kindly prepared along the route you progress along. You just need to gather the gun to fight the zombies, the hero's sword to defeat the demon king, and the memos from researchers and sages and you've got it all. Do you really think things would be that simple in this harsh real world?"

"…I said that isn't fucking it."

"Oh, should you really be pressing a gun between Misaka's eyes, you parent? This Misaka would like to be treated the same as the other Misakas."

Accelerator had stuck the handheld device and the parchments under the arm with his cane and was pressing a mass of metal just below Misaka Worst's forehead. To be that annoyed but to have not yet pulled the trigger would have

been unthinkable for the old him. After all that had happened to that monster, he had softened a little.

“Whether you’re talking about high-level security encryption on computers or encrypted plans from da Vinci’s time, it all comes down to math. The number of digits is a bit different, but the root of it all remains the same. The code put on cell phones for privacy can be broken by repeating the same simple calculation over and over again. People only think of it as safe because the numbers are so huge that it would take too long to do it that way. The actual method of encoding isn’t all that complex.”

“So?”

“So I dealt with it using math. I broke apart all the information into 1s and 0s and then put it together like a puzzle in my head. Under normal thinking, I should have been able to solve it that way. At the very least, I should have at least gotten a clue to how it’s encoded. …Let’s just ignore that the numbers are so large that it would take hundreds of years.”

“Misaka senses the kind of misfortune and frustration that she loves so much in how you said ‘should have’.”

“I can’t solve the puzzle,” Accelerator readily admitted. “I’m missing a piece, so I can’t use just math. I can manage up to a certain point, but something is definitely off. It’s like I’m trying to calculate Pi and an error occurs at the 100th digit every time. There’s some other kind of laws mixed in. Unless I can fill in the missing piece, I can’t correct for this error. The further I continue the calculations, the greater the error spreads until I’ve lost sight of what I’m trying to find.”

“So whatever these parchments are, you can’t get the parameters you need?”

“I can’t do this with math, but I have to solve it somehow, so I’ve brought together every single bit of knowledge I have. I do have the #1 brain in Academy City after all. I’m not particularly proud of it, but I have a lot packed in here. And so I started doing a self-search through every part of my head pulling out every kind of information and just pulling it out and pulling it out and pulling it out.”

His words alone continued.

Misaka Worst should know what he meant. His calculative and linguistic abilities were being supplemented by the almost 10,000 Sisters. In other words, his original intellectual specs were simply that great.

“And then I suddenly realized it.”

“Realized what?”

“I already have things I can’t understand inputted within me.”

“…”

“I first thought of the previous battle between the water angel and the scientific angel, but that wasn’t the right answer. Before that, well before that, I understood it with my own body.”

Accelerator spoke as if he had realized something.

“Yes.”

Speaking of his own loss would have been unthinkable for the person he had once been. But now his priorities had changed.

If he could protect a small life in exchange for his pride, he would unhesitatingly cast it aside.

“I was unable to reflect an unknown attack. It just went straight through my defenses and cut my body in two. I couldn’t come up with a single way of dealing with it. I was utterly defeated at that time.”

He now had enough leeway to smile.

He pushed on his own back and took another step forward.

“But it wasn’t that the attack did not have vectors. I’m sure I had those unknown laws inputted into my body from Aiwass back then.”

Thinking back on it, that had been what had happened.

Aiwass had not just erased his powers like that Level 0.

The being had not worked around his powers like Kihara Amata or Kakine Teitoku.

Aiwass had used a completely straightforward attack and its vectors had directly struck Accelerator. In that case, that information should have been transferred to Accelerator.

A hint had been within his own head from the beginning. The answer was within him. Aiwass had said to go to Russia, but it had not said the solution needed to save Last Order would be simply laid out before him. All that monster had presented to him was the key to the vault.

He mustn't write it off as "unknown".

He mustn't just throw it into the black box.

He needed to establish nonexistent vector axes that could deal with what seemed off. He needed to think of math dealing with things such as imaginary numbers that did not actually exist in the real world but that could be explained using purely mathematical calculations. He had to calculate what the values were from the vectors before his eyes in order to determine what laws were used to create them. He could not figure it all out just from Aiwass. Aiwass was a nonstandard monster. A fragment of an asteroid altered by tremendous heat was nothing more than a rock in and of itself. However, using high level formulas on it could become a key to guessing at the spread of the universe from the big bang.

Of course, he may not be able to grasp a perfect picture of it, but he could put together an inference that was exceedingly close to the truth.

The big bang at the start of the universe had yet to be proven to be a giant explosion. All that had been done was using giant ring-shaped particle accelerators to recreate and confirm the physical phenomena theorized to have happened after the explosion.

Physicists used that to continually bring the original explosion as close as possible to reality in their minds as they filled in the details bit by bit.

He just had to do the same thing.

The skill to focus and control the vectors of forces and alter them into attacks

was nothing more than an added value. Most likely, the core of the reason he existed slept in what he was doing there.

When he had naturally been given his esper name, he had surely understood it on an instinctual level, but Accelerator once more became strongly aware of that reason.

“By mixing in nonexistent math similar to imaginary numbers into the contents of the parchments and inputting just one line of a unique physical formula, it rises to the surface. But that isn’t what’s important. Once I have solved the puzzle using the rules I put together myself, the mysterious Aiwass vectors in my head have been cut down to an inference exceedingly close to reality on the same level as the big bang theory. In other words,” Accelerator paused for a second, “I have the parameters needed to save this brat. Now is the time to turn this around.”

He turned toward the small girl who was even then suffering for some absurd reason.

He turned toward the true battlefield where he must fight.

On September 30th when he had confronted Kihara Amata who led the Hound Dog unit, the doctor known as Heaven Canceller had said rather unfunny things that had hit him where it had hurt, but now Accelerator felt he could step into that same field again with pride. Accelerator now understood the value of fighting to protect a life and of putting effort into securing that life.

Not all fights involved physical conflict.

Taking from others was not the only way to win.

Up until then, he had sworn to stand at the peak of villainy in order to protect those important to him from the unreasonable darkness. He continued having fights to the death with bastards a lot like him in the bloody back alleys. Each time he had lost a lot in exchange for his victory which led to him being swallowed up by the darkness even further.

However, this fight was different.

He no longer needed to remain a villain!!

“…Heh.”

Accelerator hung his head down and contemplated what that meant for an instant.

He contemplated it deeply.

When he raised his head once more, the trembling that had been in his eyes as he wandered about Russia was gone.

“Let’s get started,” was his short comment.

He did not need to make any especially showy actions.

He just had to close his eyes and bring out the answer he had come to in his head in the form of his voice.

That would end it.

That would end it all.

The massive formula was outputted into the world in the form of song data.

Misaka Worst may have been surprised as she watched from the side, but it was nothing special. In the past, Accelerator had eliminated Amai Ao’s virus using his own power. This was merely in a different form, so there was no reason he shouldn’t be able to do it. He had everything he needed. All he had to do was keep it in the best condition through to the end and produce the desired results like he was a machine.

That was how it was supposed to go.

However, the mechanism that was supposed to move slowly got caught somewhere.

It was a slight but ominous vibration like the omen of a train disastrously derailing.

(The golden sky…!?)

Mysterious vectors like Aiwass’s were pressing down on him from above.

(I see. It isn’t too surprising that something like that would interfere with this a bit.)

Static ran through TVs or radios when they were near power lines with high voltage currents running through them. It was the same as that. He immediately determined that and made slight adjustments to his equations.

He was reminded of a ball rolling down a slope.

At the bottom of slope was a cliff.

If he continued to adjust his equations, he would cross a decisive line. Whatever he analyzed, Accelerator was an existence living within the normal physical laws. He himself would not be immersed just by knowing of the mysterious laws.

He would cross that line.

He would be swallowed up by the mysterious laws.

Accelerator knew that, but he did not stop. He continued on. He shot down the slope in a straight line. He could already see the edge of the cliff. Accelerator saw that deep hole as a gate. He unhesitatingly headed forward and leapt into the bottomless darkness.

He crossed that line in an instant.

Immediately afterwards, a change occurred.

“…!!!???”

With a cracking noise, something within his body let out a cry. The blood vessels on the back of his hand swelled up oddly. He became strongly aware that he had thick blood pipelines running from his fingertips to his shoulders. As soon as he noticed that, something tore. His skin ripped from the inside and a dark-red liquid squirted out.

Had he realized it?

By breathing in a way impossible for a normal person and using vibrations from

his entire body rather than just his throat, he had let out an extremely special voice. With that voice, he was refining his life force into magic power, putting together a spell, and outputting it into the real world. In other words, he was using true magic.

Espers could not use magic.

If they forcibly used it, what awaited them was an enormous rejection reaction.

The damage did not remain in just one place. The flows of the arteries, veins, and nerves running through his entire body like spider webs gave him a strange pulse and pain while bringing their presence to the front of his mind. He was made strongly aware of the expansion and contraction of his organs as well as their locations. More sweat flowed from his body in an instant than if he were to enter a sauna. That clear and unpleasant liquid mixed with something red. Accelerator thought small scale explosions were occurring in various places across his body. That prediction was not wrong.

But he continued because he had no reason to stop there.

“Ohhhhhhhh!!!!!!”

A wild yet solemn voice similar to a primitive aborigine dancing song spread throughout the white land. His entire body was soaked in blood and countless wounds were being expanded from within, but there was not even the slightest shaking in his voice. That was the strength of his will. He wanted to save a certain small girl. With that feeling alone, he overcame the very real pain and carried out his high-level mental work without the slightest error.

There were stories from the age when the Christian Church was still persecuted by the Romans saying that many believers would occasionally witness the form of angels while they were being gruesomely tortured.

There was a rather dreamless view saying that it was an illusion created from the excretion of excess chemicals in the brain in order to escape the excruciating pain. After all, the appearance of the angel was just too convenient. If angels actually existed and that powerful being was on their side, why had the Romans not been slaughtered there?

That view may have been accurate in some cases.

But what if those believers who were in that extreme mental state had subconsciously carried out the mental work needed to delicately carry out a complex and powerful spell that allowed them to temporarily control Telesma in order to perform a high level summoning? Wasn't that another explanation that had some dreams left in it? Couldn't it be explained as those believers responding with wordless words and briefly calling in a real angel via some quick spell?

Yes.

Accelerator prayed.

He prayed wholeheartedly. He wished for nothing else. He paid no heed even to his own pain. Academy City's strongest monster did nothing but continually pray so that he could protect the one who was more important to him than his own life.

That white angel had been thrown down to the depths of the earth by a great amount of evil. He had crawled back up seeking light, but his wings had been broken by a different monster.

But would anyone think that he was "fallen" by looking at his bloody face?

Or would they think that his shining light would not be clouded even if he fell to the depths of hell?

It was the same as with the many believers who had been looked down on, thrown into cells, or thrown into brothels, and yet those unsightly and filthy places had been completely transformed into shining places of faith.

His soul was not so stained that he did not have a place to stand.

Sinners would face their sins, risk their lives and work to make up for their sins, and wash away that darkness.

It was not a mere performance.

It was not something another could force one to do.

The world was not so cold as to not save those who truly searched within their

hearts, continually fought to change their ways, and tried to break from their destiny. Among the important historical figures of the Christian Church, there were those who had originally brought suffering to the Christians as Romans. Those people had regretted what they had done for the rest of their lives, but had headed down a path of hardships but also salvation as they continually fought to make up for their sins as much as they possibly could.

What was Accelerator at that time?

Was he a good person or a villain?

Was he a human or a monster?

Was he of science or of magic?

If you had asked him, he would unhesitatingly have answered as follows: *Isn't that obvious? No other word can describe me other than "me"*.

"Gaaahhhhhh!!!!!!"

By walking down that bloody path, Accelerator had broken every single chain binding him.

There was nothing left limiting him.

He could head forward as far as he needed to.

To save Last Order's small life, he did nothing but head down the path he believed in.

He became covered in blood.

He continued to sing.

And…

Part 2

Where had Takitsubo Rikou gone?

The battle with Mugino was over and additional attackers had been seen coming down from a bomber, so Hamazura Shiage needed to meet back up with Takitsubo as quickly as possible. Even if he was going to come up with a plan, he did not want to do so while they were separated.

“Dammit!! Where is she!? Takitsubo! Where are you!?”

As he loudly called out her name, Hamazura grabbed a thick branch. An avalanche had torn up the snow-covered base of the mountain. He had lost track of Takitsubo around the time of his battle with Mugino. The fact that no response came after he searched around the area and called her name meant that it was possible she was buried beneath the snow.

Despite working in that freezing land, Hamazura worked up a sweat and his throat dried up. Hamazura took a drink from a bottle of carbonated water. The water was still water because it had been within his jacket. If it had been lying on the ground, it would have quickly frozen.

Meanwhile, Mugino Shizuri disinterestedly watched Hamazura panicking from a slight distance.

“Hey!! You help search too, Mugino!! I can’t find Takitsubo! I can’t even take a guess where she might be!! So help me! I need as much help as I can get!!”

“Why do I have to do that?”

“What do I do? What do I do? The burden of the Body Crystal may have been lessened, but she’s still far from being fully recovered. We can’t just leave her out here in the cold. We need to get her warm. Takitsubo’s weak. She’s a weak girl. It’s all the Body Crystal’s fault that she’s like that…”

“…”

Academy City’s #4 Level 5, Mugino Shizuri, struck with Meltdowner.

With an explosive noise, a mass of snow right next to Hamazura evaporated in a straight line. There was such power to it that it caused a phreatic explosion sending Hamazura’s body flying into the air.

Mugino shook her head.

“O-oh, no. I feel dizzy. This might be the result of the Body Crystal…of the Body Cry-stal. There’s a lot going on with my body’s drive, but…no, I think I might just pitifully pass out.”

“What are you doing, Muginoooooo!? Don’t you know that the weak bunny that is Takitsubo could be buried anywhere around heeerrrre!?” Hamazura yelled out in a girly falsetto while lying on the ground.

“…What a pain. Fine, I’ll help you dig her out.”

“Keeeee!! You need to make a clear distinction between jokes and serious statements!! I can’t deal with this. I really do need someone who is completely harmless!!”

Mugino then pointed behind Hamazura with an unbelievably unmotivated expression.

“She’s silently approaching.”

“Waahh!?” Hamazura yelled out upon seeing the ghost girl Takitsubo Rikou quietly drawing near.

But that meant they were all there.

Hamazura checked on the situation now that all three of them were gathered.

He looked up at the golden sky.

He could tell the Academy City attackers heading down amid that psychedelic scenery were about to land a bit away. Their clothing did not match the white snowy plain. They were wearing black battle outfits. They looked like the kind of outfit that would be supplied to urban special forces. They had nothing that looked like a gun.

“…”

Mugino Shizuri had fired her Meltdowner just a moment ago, but it could not be used in real battle anymore.

She would be able to fire 2 or 3 shots, but that would be the limit for her body that had been ravaged by the Body Crystal. She could possibly manage against a stationary target, but it was unclear if she could hit enemies irregularly running around at high speed. It would be difficult indeed to take out those attackers when she had so few shots left.

Takitsubo Rikou would not be any help. The negative effects of the Body Crystal had been alleviated to a certain extent, but she had not undergone any fundamental treatment. And even if she was at full strength, she was more suited for logistical support. His image of her was not that of someone who was skilled at close quarters combat much less someone who could blow away an enemy with a powerful esper ability.

The attackers knew that.

That was why they had parachuted down from the bomber in clear view. Otherwise, they would have been more cautious in their approach.

Hamazura charged into the forest of conifer trees.

A few dozen meters ahead, he saw a figure approaching slowly but surely across the snow. Hamazura held his breath and stared.

It was not a normal soldier.

The attacker was wearing completely black clothes and a gold and white flat mask covered his face. The strange mask seemed to stretch up over twice as high as the attacker’s face. There were no holes for the eyes or mouth. It seemed patterns could be drawn with various man-made lights covering the mask like LED decorations for a cell phone. Hamazura did not know what it meant, but a faint LED would occasionally be emitted. From the stature, the cheekbones, and the other parts of the head the mask did not cover, it seemed the attacker was a man.

“…”

Just staring at the enemy would not change things in Hamazura’s favor.

He checked on his surroundings and on the weapons he could use.

As Mugino and Takitsubo would be of no use, it would not be a good idea to fight alongside them. He had made them retreat into a nearby cave. Hamazura had to fight the attackers, but he also had to distance them from that cave.

He held the assault rifle in his hands and turned off the unrefined safety with his thumb.

(…Did they sacrifice armor for lighter movements?)

Hamazura stared between the trees at the attacker in the strange mask from a few dozen meters away.

The attacker's outfit looked too thin to have bulletproof plates embedded in it. However, given the situation, it was best to assume it had some ridiculous technology that gave some kind of ridiculous effect.

(A special fiber could stop a bullet, but would the shock of the impact get through? In that case, a 7.62 mm bullet would do it. The Anti-Skill protectors look like they would be better than that just based on thickness alone. It looks like he can move quickly in that, but I might be able to do something if I do it before he notices me.)

Suddenly, the attacker's head turned in his direction. The attacker was not holding anything like a gun, but if his strength was reinforced with springs that expanded and contracted with electrical signals like the ones used in Hard Taping, he would be able to tear a human body in two with his bare hands.

Hamazura was out of time.

His hands shot up and he pulled the trigger with the barrel pointed toward the attacker.

A shock hit his right shoulder like it had been punched.

The first shot struck a tree trunk partway there.

The second shot travelled straight for the attacker.

A high pitched noise and sparks exploded out.

The rifle bullet did not pierce the attacker. An exceedingly lifelike-looking wing suddenly stretched out from the middle of the flat gold and white mask. It acted as a shield to cover that slim body.

“Wha—!?”

Hamazura thought his breathing had stopped, but it was not simply due to seeing that organic wing.

Familiar words appeared in light on the mask covering the attacker’s face.

Equ.DarkMatter.

That was the esper name of Academy City’s #2 Level 5 who had confronted Mugino Shizuri.

Hamazura heard a creaking noise.

The attacker was preparing to charge in toward him.

“Oooohhhhh!!”

Hamazura shouted as he continuously fired on full auto.

The sound of metal being scraped apart repeatedly rang out. The cartridges being spat out were striking each other in midair adding a sound like small bells to the gunfire.

However, that scraping noise was not because the attacker’s body was being blown to pieces.

It was the sound of the multiple white wings that had flowed out of the large flat mask knocking every single bullet to the ground.

Hamazura could not reach him.

Immediately after despair filled Hamazura’s chest, the attacker moved.

With a roar, the many wings flapped and filled the dozens of meters between them.

Hamazura did not have time to avoid it.

They flew straight toward him like bullets.

A dull creaking noise came from within Hamazura's upper body.

"Gaaahhh!?"

The mere fact that he could cry out showed that he had gotten off easy.

His body flew a few meters through the air and collapsed atop the snow. He felt a hard root in his back. After just that one attack, he could taste blood in his mouth.

Hamazura heard the sound of something slicing through the wind.

Multiple wings stretched from the attacker's gold and white mask and were released around the entire area like whips.

Hamazura rolled across the ground while stifling the yell that was stuck in his throat.

The conifer trees making up the forest were smoothly sliced through. The ground nearby was torn up and thick trees fell over around Hamazura who continued to roll.

The white wings and the mask were made of the same substance.

They spread unnaturally like a sugar sculpture stretched in heat.

"No…" Hamazura muttered.

He had never seen Kakine Teitoku actually use his power, but from what he could tell, there was something off.

"This isn't Dark Matter or any other esper power…?"

The attacker did not respond.

Instead, the attacker slowly turned the multiple white wings toward Hamazura.

“!?”

Hamazura frantically tried to get up and head back to get some distance, but another attack came from behind. There was more than one attacker. By the time Hamazura realized that, it was too late. The trunk of the tree behind him was sliced apart as multiple white wings attacked from behind.

He was fortunate that he was struck by the tree trunk instead of the white wings.

However, that was still like being struck like a hammer, so Hamazura was knocked away.

That time, he was not able to cry out.

As he lay on the white snow, Hamazura realized that there were red stains around him. He was in such pain that it took him a little longer to realize that was because he was bleeding.

Lying on the ground, he moved only his eyes to look around.

He could see three of them.

He had no idea when the final one had shown up.

“Psychic powers are similar to fire,” said one of the attackers.

They were all wearing the same type of mask, so Hamazura could not tell which one was speaking.

“Fire is a great power that only humans can control, but just swinging fire around brings you no further than a caveman’s torch. Civilized man uses fire to temper iron. It is the same as that.”

(I see.)

Level 5 powers like Mugino Shizuri’s Meltdowner and Kakine Teitoku’s Dark Matter produced effects that exceeded the normal physical laws. In that case, what new materials could be manufactured using those powers? Could they perhaps create brand new materials that ignored everything derived from the elementary particles, atoms, and molecules extending from the big bang?

Just like how carbon nanotubes were different from mere masses of carbon. Just like how semiconductors that carried out high speed calculations were different from mere masses of glass. Just like how steel that had a high level heat treatment applied was different from mere soft iron.

A new substance created using an energy source that did not exist in that world would possess properties that did not exist in that world.

It was to the point where one could mock a true Level 5 as nothing but a caveman with a torch.

"…You certainly seem calm," spat out Hamazura. "Did you give Mugino the Body Crystal because you wanted to treat that #4 'fire' as a weapon and use her like a flamethrower filled with naphtha? And when that didn't work out, you came to collect her before the coals went out? What do you plan to do next? Are you going to hook her up to a medical device and turn her into a blast furnace for creating new materials?"

If that were the case, Hamazura was not needed for their project.

Academy City had been pursuing him from the start, so a Level 0 like him would just be killed.

The masked attackers drew closer from three different directions.

He could likely not defeat them with just an assault rifle. Even the Level 5 the materials were created from had the power to single-handedly take on an entire military unit. Hamazura would not be able to defeat even one of the attackers even if he had a tank or a howitzer.

That was if he attacked them straight on.

However, Hamazura Shiage had not stood before them in order to be killed.

"Hey," he said while still on the ground with no strength in his arms or legs. "Because I rolled all over the place like that, what was in my pocket is gone. It may have fallen out somewhere."

The attackers paid his comment no heed.

They would quickly kill the two rebels and retrieve Mugino Shizuri.

That was all that was on the attackers' minds as one stepped forward and felt something hard crunch under his foot.

It was a clear shard. It appeared to be the remnants of a broken glass container.

"Damn. And that was my last hope," Hamazura said as if he were giving up on something. "I finally thought I had something I could use to negotiate with Academy City and then this happens."

An ominous feeling swelled up within the attackers.

Hamazura continued to speak to the attackers who supposedly had the absolute advantage.

"That was a package of the bacterial wall the Russian special unit was trying to disseminate. I'd rather you hadn't stepped on that right before my eyes."

The atmosphere instantaneously froze. The attackers from the dark side of Academy City had been given the specs of the bacterial wall used in the Kremlin Report.

It was a type of virus that spread through the air and had a higher than 80% death rate for those infected. It had an extremely high resistance to heat, so boiling would have no effect. As such, toxic high density ozone was needed to sterilize it. Also worth mentioning was the fact that the virus had the ability to break down oils meaning it could eat through the filters in protective masks, vehicles, and other constructions. It was stored without any moisture to prevent it from becoming active, but once it left the package and came in contact with the moisture in the air, there was no way of stopping it.

There was even a risk of infection if you were entirely covered in special masks and suits!!

"Shit!!"

Panic came over the attackers for the first time. They knew it was pointless, but they tried to get away from the broken glass container.

And then Hamazura Shiage quickly swung his arms holding the assault rifle.

“Just kidding, you idiots. That’s a bottle of carbonated water.”

“!?”

By the time the attackers realized it, it was too late.

Hamazura stood up on his knees and forced his body forward. He stuck the rifle between the white wings and forced its aim toward the attacker’s waist.

He did not have time to hesitate.

He pulled the trigger.

With a sharp gun shot, the attacker collapsed onto the ground like roughly opening and closing a door. The attacker was protected by the white wings. If he had been shot from anywhere else, it was clear what would have happened.

“You bastard!!”

The attackers had never expected one of their own to be taken out. The other two frantically flapped their white wings.

At that rate, Hamazura would be sliced to pieces. The thick tree trunks would not act as cover from those white wings.

However, the body of a man using the same technology lay at his feet. Hamazura moved to the side and leapt behind the white wings that were still coming from the dead body. The white wings that seemed to slice through anything were obstructed and repelled by wings made of the same substance.

Hamazura kicked the body changing the angle of the neck…or rather, the angle of the wings coming from the mask. The white wings flew down like guillotines toward the attackers.

They both had the same type of weapon.

That meant they were able to block the white wings, too.

Multiple white wings grew from the masks as the attackers used everything they

had to block the attack. Yes, they used everything they had. They had no room to spare. That was when Hamazura aimed his assault rifle like he was sticking it out from under his arm.

A scream rang out.

Along with the short burst of bullets, red liquid scattered about and the second attacker collapsed atop the snow.

However, that was the limit.

The third attacker counterattacked. Multiple white wings squirmed about and tore into the ground below Hamazura's feet rather than at the boy himself. He lost his balance making him unable to aim his assault rifle. He was completely powerless. The attacker first made sure he himself was safe and then unhesitatingly headed forward. He grabbed Hamazura's neck with one hand and moved that half of his body forward in order to push the boy's back against the trunk of a tree that had barely managed to survive during that battle.

"Gah!?"

A shock ran through Hamazura's body, his breathing stopped, and the grip of the assault rifle slipped from his hands. His legs dangled above the ground. The attacker said nothing and spread the white wings wide. There was no mercy in his actions.

"…Aren't you forgetting something important?"

However, Hamazura smiled.

He spoke as he smiled.

"Even if her body's balance is off due to the Body Crystal, Mugino Shizuri is the #4. She can still fire two or three shots."

"…"

As the attacker held Hamazura up with a single arm, the face of the mask moved a bit.

“You’re bluffing. The same trick will not work on me twice. Mugino Shizuri’s level of performance can be seen in the fact that she lost to the likes of you.”

“I see. That’s too bad.”

Hamazura’s arms went limp.

He made one last comment as his limbs dangled down.

“I guess you’ll just get shot through while still feeling triumphant in your victory.”

A brilliant beam of light shot out.

By the time the attacker perceived it, it was already over.

The attacker was sticking the right side of his body forward to grasp Hamazura's throat with his right arm. That arm was blown off at the shoulder…or so Hamazura thought. In reality, the man's shoulder and right chest were torn off along with it. There was a giant cavity eating all the way into just below his neck.

Hamazura fell to the ground with a thud. The torn off arm was still stuck to his neck.

"What…?"

The attacker's gaze turned in shock toward the source of the beam of light. Two girls stood there a few hundred meters away. One girl was limp and wearing a yellow coat and the other was wearing a pink track suit. The girl in the yellow coat was leaning on the girl in the track suit's shoulder.

Mugino Shizuri's balance was off due to the Body Crystal, so she was not able to aim carefully. Even if she had 2 or 3 shots to spare, they would not hit.

So…

(It was Takitsubo Rikou… That #4 relied on someone else to correct her aim…?)

The attacker did not realize that he was not speaking those words out loud.

(No, it's not just that. Even the bacterial wall bluff…was nothing more than preparation for this. If I had known Mugino Shizuri was aiming for me, I could have easily dealt with it… That's why he made me think that any showy possibilities were nothing more than bluffs…That way, I would let my guard down and give them a chance to slowly aim at me…)

With 2 or 3 shots, all of the attackers could have been taken out as long as all of the shots would hit.

If even one shot was evaded, it was over. No, the white wings coming from the mask most likely could deflect those weakened Meltdowner attacks.

(So…)

Hamazura's defeat of the two attackers with the assault rifle had been nothing more than good luck on top of their strategy. His role had been to keep the attackers still, buy some time, and allow Mugino to finish them off.

The wounded #4 had not been able to fight the way things had been.

That was why Hamazura had changed the situation to one where the wounded girl *could* fight.

The attackers had completely fallen for their trick.

"God…dammit…"

The attacker's horribly wounded body wobbled to the side and collapsed onto the snow.

Even so, he moved the mask.

With his last strength, he tried to take Hamazura down with him.

But then he felt something hard press up against the side of his head next to the mask.

It was the barrel of an assault rifle.

"How could…this happen…?"

The attacker finally started to regret it.

The attackers' primary objective had been to kill the two rebelling against Academy City, Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou. However, their opponent had been a Level 0, so they had taken him lightly and had neglected to do a proper analysis of his strength.

"So this is…Hamazura Shiage…"

"No, you've got that wrong," said the boy who was aiming his assault rifle down while standing on wobbly legs. "This is Item. Make sure to remember that while you burn in hell."

Part 3

There was no real reason for it.

His right arm simply had a special power within it.

Imagine there was a nuclear missile about to be fired before your eyes and you held the control key in your hand and the firing control panel was right in front of you.

Was it unnatural to put the key in and try to stop it from firing? Wouldn't it be more unnatural to say things like "I'm not a specialist, so I don't understand it" or "I'm not a soldier or a police officer, so I have no obligation to risk my life" and stand there without doing anything? Wouldn't it be more unnatural to not do it because you had no reason *to* do it?

Someone who would do that would not be human.

They would be nothing more than a toy that had run out of drive.

No reason was needed to fight. In fact, not doing anything in a great crisis would bring guilt. And he had the necessary things in the necessary amounts. Instead of trying to stretch his hand out toward a place he could never reach, he instead continued making slow preparations for a long period of time like creating stairs out of wooden boxes.

It was for the sake of a single success.

It was for the sake of a victory that required no reason.

He felt that boy was the same. They both possessed right arms that had special abilities even if they had different properties. That was why he continued to fight using the power of that right arm. He had no doubts over the reason behind that process. After all, he had no need to think about it. In fact, he had no reason to come to a stop.

That was why he fought in the same way.

That was how it should have been.

And yet…

A great high-pitched noise rang throughout the Star of Bethlehem.

It was the sound of Kamijou Touma's right hand repelling the flow coming from Fiamma of the Right's third arm.

Kamijou's Imagine Breaker could not negate a power all at once if it was too great. He used that fact to his advantage to press against the side of Fiamma's approaching attack pushing it like a train changing tracks, making it slip, and causing that overwhelming attack's trajectory to veer off.

Fiamma wondered why.

His right arm altered the strength of the power it presented to match the strength of the enemy he must defeat. And Fiamma had determined his enemy was World War III. In other words, it was a great calamity that could destroy an entire planet contaminating the surrounding area of space with a large amount of debris. By bringing together the Star of Bethlehem, Misha Kreutzev, and the flesh-and-blood right arm that acted as a container for Imagine Breaker, he should have succeeded in drawing out the proper ability. Fiamma should possess the power to single-handedly claim victory over that large war that was a mix of science and magic.

It was like the power to destroy all of humanity on the face of the earth. He was trying to use that for the sake of salvation, but it would have been possible for him to bring an end to human history if he used it in a certain way.

However…

"…Why were you able to stop that?" Fiamma muttered.

He adjusted his grip on the remote control spiritual item.

The golden light in the heavens focused together and rained down straight for Kamijou Touma matching the movement of Fiamma's third arm.

“Is it that great an ability? It is merely the power to negate the supernatural!! It is merely the power to grab and twist a power it cannot completely negate!! …I should be able to sink an entire continent into the ocean with a single wave of my right arm. I should be able to dry up all the water in the oceans with a single strike!! You were nothing more than an adapter connected to that right arm until the designated time. You were nothing more than a potato shoot that is to be returned to the earth after the potato is collected!!”

Guided by the 103,000 grimoires, the power of salvation bared its fangs.

The golden rain fell.

It fell on about half of the surface of the Star of Bethlehem. The mass of stone structures crumbled bit by bit and large cracks ran through even the floor Kamijou and Fiamma stood upon. The pressure sent ferocious winds flying in every direction and it caused such fierce destruction that even Fiamma brought his third arm up to protect his face.

However, Kamijou Touma did not go down.

His right arm was pointed straight up. He had forcibly repelled the first strike and it has exploded out like a liquid having something dropped into it. The after effects of that struck the downpour and distorted the trajectories of the beams of light.

Why?

That boy’s right arm should not have held such great ability.

A single attack from Fiamma should have destroyed all of humanity. He should have been able to deal with even Vento of the Front or Acqua of the Back with a single wave of his right arm.

“Do you still not understand?” Kamijou Touma asked from within that ruined room that had lost even its ceiling due to the bombardment from the heavens.

His voice was low and heavy.

“You said that right arm changes its ability based on the strength of your enemy. The stronger your enemy, the more strength it draws out. And to draw out the

arm’s power to the maximum, you had to cause World War III to increase the people’s malice. You needed to complete your preparations to make the form of the enemy you must defeat clear.”

So what?

World War III was continuing even then. Tragedy created more tragedy and the spiraling malice would spread out to every corner of that planet. Fiamma’s holy power would increase in response to that ugly sight and he would purify the entire world once his preparations were complete.

“But that brings in another possibility,” Kamijou spun his right arm around as if to check on his shoulder.

The joint made a cracking noise as he did so.

“What if everyone’s hearts were not filled with malice to the extent you thought they were? Then you would not be able to draw out as much power as you expected.”

Fiamma’s eyebrows moved ever so slightly.

He stared past the broken wall and down at the distant surface of the earth. The golden light was shining down, but he could not see deep down at the surface. The dust and evaporated particles may have gathered together creating a screen. It was like the world was covered in a smokescreen emitted by the minds of the people killing each other in that war.

“…You’re making an incorrect assumption.”

Fiamma of the Right shook his third arm.

He tightly gripped the remote control spiritual item that supported him with a vast amount of knowledge.

Clear hatred resided in his eyes.

“This world is twisted. It can no longer be controlled. The four great elements that make up its core would have been utterly destroyed had I not corrected them. Remaining resources, opposing races, religious differences, lack of food,

warring countries, destroyed borders, and everything else becomes intertwined creating a situation where each problem cannot be resolved in turn."

"…"

"You're saying I was not able to gather up as much malice as I assumed? Don't make me laugh. That is nothing more than nonsense coming from someone who does not understand what malice is!! That great war is continuing even now and it is making everyone honest!! Nation, race, religion, gender, language, money, bloodline, talent, and all the other small thorns in people's hearts are starting to be brought out into the world!! …Do you really want to believe that the depths of human hearts are that pure? What part of a human heart could be pure with the things they have done!?"

"It's true that human hearts are not something to be viewed from the outside. Human nature may be something dripping with darkness. There may even be malice sleeping within me without my knowledge and I simply do not wish to believe it is there."

Kamijou did not stop speaking there.

"But that is not all there is to human nature."

"What…?"

"How can you say that there is only one aspect to what is inside people? How can you claim that there is dark malice within the depths of our hearts and that there is nothing else there?"

There was a deep darkness spreading throughout people's hearts that nothing could be done about. Humans did not only think about making connections with others. They also possessed a nature that led them to distance themselves from others under many different pretexts such as protecting themselves, ensuring their own safety, and monopolizing things. Hurting others and rejecting others were completely natural actions to take.

However, there was also an even greater light sleeping within them at the same time. There was a virtue that people were normally too embarrassed to mention out loud. There was a justice that one did not feel the need to show off. Those things surely existed. They may not be visible, but they were definitely there.

It would be odd if they were not.

If there was truly nothing more than malice that led people to kill others, then humanity would have fought itself to destruction long ago. The fact that everyone was still living to that day and that history had continued on showed that the desire to connect with others was stronger than the desire to destroy others.

“I did not need a reason.” Kamijou Touma clenched his right fist anew. “It was not that I was strong. You merely failed on your own. Even with no reason, humans will fight for those that are important to them. Even with no special power, they will still fight because they wish to protect them. I was saved by that power.”

“With no reason?” Fiamma looked at Kamijou with an expression like he was seeing something he could not believe. “That is the conclusion that only fits for us. Imagine that a nuclear missile is about to be fired. We hold the control key and the control panel stands before us. It is true that we need no reason to put in the key and try to stop the launch. However, those who do not hold the key cannot stop the missile.”

“You don’t need the key.” Kamijou’s rebuttal came without even a second’s delay. “You can stick wires into the keyhole. You can open up the control panel and mess with the computer cables. You can even shoot at the missile itself just before it launches. Having the key or not only matters for one of many means of resolving it. There is absolutely no reason to stand by and watch the missile launch. …Anyone can fight. As long as you have something you wish to risk your life to protect even if it makes the entire world your enemy, you can fight.”

“What an idiot,” Fiamma muttered.

He realized anew that Kamijou Touma was a being with a mentality fundamentally different from his own.

“I’ll be taking Index back,” Kamijou Touma announced as he took a large step forward. “And not just that. The fighting between the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church, the conflict between science and magic, and the fighting between countries across the world in World War III will all end here.”

“Do you really think you can do that?”

As if in response to Kamijou’s step forward, Fiamma of the Right spread his third arm out wide.

That surefire arm increased in destructive force in response to human malice.

“Do you really think that you can have a complete victory without losing anything in such a large scale conflict!? Things like World War III are nothing more than the preliminary preparations. With the Star of Bethlehem in the heavens, the purification on the earth has already begun. Are you saying you can still bring about an easy victory!?”

“I can.”

One side was the hidden leader of the largest Christian denomination thoroughly reinforced by the sky temple known as the Star of Bethlehem, the world’s malice brought to the surface by World War III, the knowledge of 103,000 grimoires, the nature of God’s Right Seat, and that special severed right arm.

On the other side was a high school boy who had no special characteristics beyond a special right arm.

However, he had no reason to hesitate.

As such, Kamijou charged forward.

“Unlike you, I believe in the strength of humanity.”

At that time, a strange shadow showed itself as if piercing through the coastline of Barcelona.

It was a strange golden shape something like a giant arm and something like a giant snake. The hand stretched up into the air, halfway opened its fingers, and towered high into the sky without grabbing anything.

Everyone there fearfully watched it.

That area was relatively removed from the fires of the great war that was occurring. The area was not in a state of alert.

While a great number of civilians watched on, a change occurred in the golden arm.

The golden arm explosively expanded from the ground up to the fingertips. In an instant, the shape of the palm crumbled and was transformed like a giant balloon.

The sound of the distorted sphere reaching its limit could be heard.

And…

At that time, at the end of the 100 meter arm shooting up from the surface of the Sea of Japan, the palm lost its basic shape and turned into a distorted sphere and it clenched tightly into a fist as if attempting to crush itself.

Immediately afterwards, it burst.

At the same time, the giant 100 meter arm broke to pieces and a tremendous shockwave spread in all directions.

The calamity that appeared in the world was outputted in the form of high waves. It was as if a giant space station had struck the ocean's surface. A wall of seawater over 30 meters high spread out evenly in a circle.

The aircraft carriers, escort ships, amphibious assault ships, battleships, cruisers, and all the other various Academy City and Russian ships made of steel that were lined up and fighting were completely swallowed up.

"What is going on…?" cried out a navigation officer from an Academy City cooperative institution as he saw the giant approaching disaster.

He was not even sure if he should take refuge within the ship or to put on a life jacket and jump into the ocean.

"This goes beyond a war! What is happening to the world!?"

At that time, a golden arm exploded in a similar fashion even on the war front in Eastern Europe.

However, that one did not cause waves.

Radiating from the center of the exploding arm were thunder clouds lowering down to the surface. The dark masses of water vapor explosively spread along the surface of the earth while an odd noise reverberated throughout the area. It was the sound of sparks. It was the sound of voltages exceeding a hundred million. Those overwhelmingly high voltage currents blew apart the people absorbed by the dark clouds and fried all electronic equipment on the weapons.

“You’re kidding…” blankly muttered a man from Academy City who was hiding behind some rocks as the dark clouds approached.

The scope of the disaster was simply too great. The thunder clouds expanded to the left and right for kilometers, so there was no way of avoiding it even if he started to run. And his body would be torn to pieces within a few seconds of being absorbed by the clouds.

Faced with that ridiculous situation, only a thin smile appeared on the man’s face and then someone grabbed his ankles. It came from underneath a destroyed Russian armored vehicle. He lost his balance and was pulled underneath.

Immediately afterwards, the dark clouds shot past him.

An ominous sound like a train’s power source shorting out continued repeatedly. Just being underneath that vehicle did not leave the man unscathed. A portion of the current travelled through the surface and then mercilessly through the man’s entire body.

However, he did not die.

The groaning Academy City man finally realized something.

“You…” the man muttered while looking at the female Russian soldier who had dragged him under the vehicle. “You know we’re enemies, right? To you, I’m the detestable invader.”

“An invader who went out of his way to stop the Kremlin Report, you mean? And this is no longer any time to be worrying about the war. The line of command is all but destroyed. There are also all sorts of unconfirmed reports of similar things occurring all over the world,” the female soldier practically spat out those words as she stared at the electrified snow that had been blown up into the air as an aftereffect of that purple electricity. “I’m fighting this war to protect my family. I’m not going to let the world end or humanity to be annihilated after everything I’ve done!!”

Suddenly, they heard the cracking sound of water rapidly freezing.

Immediately afterwards, a tremendous noise exploded out.

Some kind of giant ring had appeared on a portion of the ground they could see from underneath the vehicle. The giant ring was made of a substance similar to pure gold, it had a radius of over 100 meters, and its width was greater than that of a two-lane road. It was stabbing diagonally into the ground.

The female Russian soldier thought it looked like an angel’s halo.

However, that was not the only change.

Along the area of effect from the thunder clouds that had run across the ground, giant rings, long arcing parts with tapered ends that were similar to ribs, river-like curving bundles of cloth, and other objects were being forced into that world tearing up the ground and blowing away forests. It looked like someone had turned over a giant toy box. The flood of giant constructions spread in every direction and every object was of incredible size.

The Academy City man forced words out of his dry throat.

“…What the hell is going on?”

“How should I know?” bluntly replied the Russian soldier. “The one bit of luck is that this was just a plain. If something like this happened in an urban area, the buildings would all have been destroyed.”

“And…”

A rumbling and vibrating exploded out.

The thunder clouds had passed by, but the danger was not over.

There was no rule saying there could only be one golden arm.

As long as those giant arms continued to come up from the ground, the dangers would keep coming.

“Here comes another one. What do we do!?” asked the Academy City man.

The Russian woman moved her fingers along an anti-tank rocket launcher.

“Isn’t it obvious? We end this before it can explode!! Help me, Academy City. We need your firepower!!”

“Dammit. And I’m already busy stopping the Kremlin Report!!”

“The objective is the same. Whether it’s occult or a bacterial wall, we need to destroy every single thing that is going to cause unnecessary deaths!!”

At that time, a golden arm about to explode was sliced off at about halfway and sank into the Strait of Dover.

The civilians, the soldiers, and everyone else were dumbfounded.

Amid them all, the girl who had brought that golden arm to its demise spun her single staff around.

She was a girl of about 12.

“Hey, Mark!! You’ve been slacking off on maintaining my symbolic weapon, haven’t you? Thanks to that, I’m only getting 80% output!!”

“Boss, the production and consecration of a symbolic weapon is supposed to be done by the weapon’s user, are they not?”

“Tch. But what is going on? I never thought I would end up having to help out to save the world.”

“Given the situation, it seems Fiamma of the Right’s plan is to purify the surface

of the earth. He seems to be disseminating pure Telesma to cause a change in the foundation in order to save the world. He must be thinking that changing the foundation will change all of the structures on top of it," Mark explained. "However, the mere amount is an issue. Spreading that much Telesma around will cause quite a bit of destruction. And on top of that, unlike the magic power refined within people's bodies, Telesma has an elemental color from the beginning. This causes phenomena of or derived of the element to occur."

"So it's like the flood of Noah's Ark. The passing cleanliness is no different from a disaster to us ugly humans."

The blonde girl who had been referred to as "boss" put on an evil smile that was unbefitting of her age.

And yet there was enough intensity in it that it made one think that there was no expression that better fit her lovely face.

"And we ugly humans are labeled as ugly because we do not know when to give up."

A distant explosion pounded on the girl's ears.

It was coming from the horizon. Not even that girl could eliminate all of the golden arms. The ocean where no people or ships were had low priority, so explosions like that continued intermittently.

Along the affected area of the disaster, objects like giant angel halos and bones appeared one after another.

"…I see. He's made sure to see this through. He has prepared the resources to be used in the revival after everything has been washed away. That's a huge pile of materials more valuable and convenient than gold, platinum, or tungsten."

"Well, it is possible to create objects such as clothing and weapons from Telesma, from an angel's body…but as someone who uses human magic, the scale leaves me utterly shocked."

"But it is meaningless," said the blonde girl quietly. "It may be true that having enough resources to satisfy every single person on the planet would resolve most conflict. Each individual will resolve things still as an individual. However, that

is not enough. If people are given resources, they will use those resources to expand the range of what they control. People have already built rockets and taken control of the moon's surface, so we will not stop there. We will use the deuterium on the moon and aim for Mars. That is why increasing or decreasing the amount of resources will not stop conflict. It will only change the scope of the conflict."

"Also, a material equal to the weapons and shields of the angels cannot be dealt with using human techniques. They cannot be scratched even when using lasers or diamonds and I doubt human magic can do anything to an angel's body. This is not what I would call resources. It is nothing but a pile of giant trash."

"Well, our ultimate objective is to seize control of the entire world be it the magic side or the science side. Ruling a world that has been wiped clean and is filled with useless toy blocks sounds boring. Let's go get busy with some philanthropic work."

Numerous golden arms burst up from the ground and the ocean.

The girl paid them no heed.

She rested the staff she had been spinning around on her shoulder and unhesitatingly stepped forward.

She used a megaphone a man in formal dress handed her and spoke to the entire battlefield.

"Whether you're British, French, from Academy City, or Russian, listen up!! All soldiers that can do so need to support us with your infrared aiming information transmitters! When you receive target coordinate information, provide backup fire with everything you have!! Now, the time has come for a bombardment of the people, by the people, and for the people!! Let's make this flashy, baby!!"

Some British soldiers who were too shocked to stand opened their mouths to speak despite not being able to control what they were saying.

"Wh-wha-what…? Who…are you people…?"

The girl did not turn around in response.

With her back to them and with many men in formal clothing surrounding her, the girl spoke.

She brought the megaphone to her mouth and spoke as if singing.

“We are a magic cabal. We are the Dawn-Colored Sunlight.”

At that time, Acqua of the Back stood upon a white snowy plain. He was watching an oddly-shaped shadow break through the snow on the ground and show itself.

It no longer had anything to do with Academy City, the Russian army, science, or magic.

Everyone was working together to charge at the golden arm.

They wielded their weapons to destroy the source of the calamity before it could cause another large scale explosion.

They were fighting to ensure the damage did not spread further.

They were fighting to protect those important to them.

(…You are a fool, Fiamma.)

Acqua smiled faintly.

That man’s expression almost never changed, but at that time he did smile if just a bit.

(It is not you or me who will save this world. No matter what you destroy and no matter what you bless, you cannot win over the people. For the people who live in the world, protecting that world is the obvious choice.)

In that case, the time had come for him to wield his power as one of those people.

Acqua was no longer a Saint. Nor was he a member of God’s Right Seat. He did not have the physical strength to swing up his own greatest weapon of Ascalon

and the amount of magic power he could refine was only on the level of an average magician.

But what did that matter?

Acqua was not fighting because he was a Saint or because he was a member of God's Right Seat. He did not feel that he had lived a praiseworthy life, but unfortunately, he had a lingering attachment to that world at least to the extent of being able to think of someone he wished to protect.

At that time...

"Oh, there he is. I finally found him," quietly said an old man as he removed binoculars from his eyes.

A youth next to the old man spoke to him in exasperation.

"Is this really okay? You've returned to Russia of all places. There's a rumor that the old name of the Astrological Surgery Brigade is still recorded on the black list here."

"Shut up. There's nothing wrong with me using all the spiritual items I have stockpiled for my own use. And when you heard that William Orwell was headed to Russia, you headed after him without reporting it."

"Well, I'll admit that I lost my cool. I still owe him from the time with the Orleans Knights. Not returning that favor would leave a bad taste in my mouth."

The youth held a French sword called a colichemarde that had been derived from a sports tool. Next to him stood a woman who possessed the qualities of a spell called the Oracle of d'Arc.

Those three were not alone.

Many people were gathered there. Many people had been saved along the path that mercenary walked.

"So how's the mercenary doing?"

“He’s doing mercenary work like usual. But something’s odd. I didn’t take him as someone who would toy with something like this.”

“Are you worried?”

“Of course not.”

The old man sighed and then lightly swung the Japanese sword resting on his shoulder.

It was Raikiri.[1]

That modern mass produced spiritual item was based on anecdotes of strikes from heaven being intercepted.

As if in response to that, hundreds of figures behind the old man held their own individual weapons at the ready.

“Someone that lovely deserves our assistance.”

“But,” said a young man, “I don’t think this kind of makeshift solution will be able bring an end to these disasters occurring one after another on a global scale.”

“I know. That’s what the former Astrological Surgery Brigade is for. People who freely move across the world have a network allowing them to do so. The lines set up by those obstinate people who thoughtlessly take root and protect a single place can be freely brought together.”

“?”

“Well, a senile old man like me can at least tie together the thin, thin threads. The truly tricky part will be done by more suitable people. …At the very root, they are not idiots.” After saying that, the old man lightly swung Raikiri. “What free spirits like us must do is simple. Do you know what that is, young man?”

“It is not to think about anything too difficult,” the young man smiled and swung his colichemarde in a similar manner, “and take up our swords if there is someone we must protect, right?”

“Let’s go.”

Those two words were enough.

They become a unified strength and charged into the battlefield.

At that time, Vasilisa, the head of Annihilatus, strongly kicked a female magician who had once been her subordinate causing the woman to fly into a set of double doors like a shell destroying the locked door.

Vasilisa was within a palace in Moscow.

The tremendous noise that destruction made caused the shoulders of the person confined within the room to tremble. He was a boy of about 15. He was so slender that he had a linear beauty greater than even a true woman like Vasilisa. He was so slender that it looked like he would end up in eternal sleep after three days of being out on his own. The majestic outfit of the Patriarch made him look like a small child who had put on his father’s suit.

Vasilisa spat the blood that had gathered in her mouth onto the floor and smiled.

“Hello, our great leader. It seems you were treated quite carefully to have been thrown into such a luxurious birdcage. The positions of the fairy tale boy and heroine have been completely reversed, but I’ve come to rescue you from the evil king’s castle.”

“…I did not think that anyone remained who would call me Patriarch. I had no power. No matter how much I yelled, no one would lay down their weapons. Everyone used the signature I was tricked into providing as an indulgence and refused to listen to my words attempting to repeal that decision.”

“You’re cute, so I’ll forgive you,” interrupted Vasilisa in a completely joking manner. “And there is still something for you to do. It is something only the Patriarch can do.”

“?”

Vasilisa was devoted to only Sasha Kreutzev, but her heart almost wavered at

how lovely that confused look on the Patriarch's small face was. The criteria on which she chose where her allegiances lay were quite simple. She put her hand up to her face to make sure she did not have a nosebleed.

(...C'mon, stop that. I've already lost a lot of blood, so I just don't have enough left right now.)

"Do you see that?"

Vasilisa suppressed her writhing heart and pointed toward the window.

Even from that distance, the fortress floating in the golden heavens was visible. That was just how vast its scale and altitude were. It was the fortress of God's Right Seat's Fiamma of the Right. It had been named the Star of Bethlehem from the remaining fragmentary records.

"That fortress was created by gathering the necessary parts from Christian churches and cathedrals across the world. However, each construction has its own ceremony. Just gathering them all in one place would not be enough to neatly fuse them all together."

"What are you trying to say?"

"There is a spell for connecting them," Vasilisa said while waving her finger a bit. "Fiamma used both the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. In other words, he used spells from both churches to their fullest in his plan to construct that fortress."

"In other words…"

"If we analyze it, we can break its joints. Most likely, the Russian Orthodox spells were supplied to him by Nikolai Tolstoy, but no documents to that end were found in his palace. However, we do not need to give up there. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Of course, the spells used would be ones that were top secret even in the Russian Orthodox Church. Vasilisa did not think that Fiamma would use an easily analyzed spell as the key for his fortress.

However…

“Oh, I see,” said the Patriarch moving his thin lips and lightly rubbing his chin. “The Phenomena Control and Reduction Reproduction Facility is nearby. In order to find the conditions needed for the occurrence of ghostly and spiritual phenomena, a 1/1 scale diorama facility is created where all sorts of experiments are performed…”

“If we remove the limiter, it can be applied to the Russian Orthodox magic used by humans. And if we succeed in the simulation, we can calculate out what spells Fiamma used.”

“So you’re telling me to remove that limiter.”

“I wonder if you can do it. Even with the ‘old cannibal woman of the one-legged house’ with you, your safety is not guaranteed.”

Vasilisa tried to rub the Patriarch’s head, but he moved his head to the side to avoid her hand and headed for the exit to the room. Unaware that his actions had excited her even more, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church asked her a question.

“But the Star of Bethlehem’s joints use Roman Catholic magic as well as Russian Orthodox magic. We may only be able to weaken it.”

“…Don’t worry about that. Despite being a quite stubborn, a certain oddly well connected and strange old man has helped us tie together those thin, thin threads.”

“?”

Bringing the wrinkled old woman phantom with her, Vasilisa headed along after the Patriarch.

“What I’m saying is that group is not as rotten as everyone thinks they are.”

At that time, an old man named Matthai Reese who had abandoned his position as the Roman Catholic Pope headed down underground below a half-destroyed Vatican cathedral. His objective was to analyze the spells Fiamma had used in his plan. Such a large scale plan could not be done solely with the spells for

those in God’s Right Seat. The central spells may have been from there, but it was highly possible that existing Roman Catholic magic had been used to fill in the gaps.

“Hi there, you dandy gentleman. How are things going there?” said someone via a magical communication.

“Hmph. Am I really the person you want to speak with? I am no longer the pope.”

“I am speaking with the person who I believe to be the leader of the Roman Catholic Church both in name and in reality. And I do not think Pietro Yogdis would work well together with our cute Patriarch.”

“I’ll take that to mean you succeeded in getting an audience with the Patriarch. And I have finished selecting the main books I need. I am just about ready to construct a circle for a super long distance spell that will interfere with the Star of Bethlehem in the Russian sky.”

“Oh, how convenient. It seems the Vatican does indeed have plenty of trump cards lying in wait. I could do anything I wanted if my position was given that much of a budget.”

“How much credibility is there in the theory that the changes on the earth will cease once power is taken from the Star of Bethlehem? I am still receiving reports from all over the place of golden arms producing disasters.”

“Hmm? It should be fine. The changes on the earth are occurring in response to the changes in the heavens. If we stop the changes in the heavens, the changes on the earth should stop, too.”

“I hope you’re right. If everyone ends up being sacrificed despite having stopped Fiamma, it will all have been for naught.”

“By the way, is the Roman Catholic Church really okay with this?”

“What do you mean?”

“Fiamma of the Right is in conflict with our interests. However, it is true that he is still bringing great benefit to the Roman Catholic Church. If you destroy that

foundation, there is no guarantee that the Roman Catholic Church will be able to prosper as it has in the past."

"I do not mind. …There is no point in possessing a power that cannot protect everyone. If it will save the people, I will stop Fiamma even if it strips the Roman Catholic Church of power."

"He's sinfully cute."

"…What are you talking about?"

"Our leader. I wonder if you had a time when you looked like that."

"I had a disposition that made me beloved by many, but I was never referred to in that way. I was chosen to be the pope after all, so I probably give off an image of a solemn father."

"Oh, it looks like our cute fatherly image has taken offense at that. But he's so cute!! I just want to hug him!!"

"…Actually, isn't it the fairy tale heroines that are most often referred to in that way?" Matthai Reese said half out of exasperation as he looked over the massive amount of data that was sleeping underground.

He was in a library filled with large bookshelves. The small girl known as Index Librorum Prohibitorum had once been invited there.

If he knew what spells Fiamma had used, they may be able to fight back.

They may be able to stop that huge war.

However, that also meant…

"We are helping bring about our own defeat, aren't we?" said a young priest following Matthai Reese.

"It is not a defeat," Matthai Reese corrected with a strength that stopped even others from doubting. "Even in this, we are fighting for victory."

"That victory will gain us nothing."

“If you truly think that, you would not be helping me.”

The young priest fell silent for a bit.

Only the sound of flipping pages could be heard.

“…Can we redo it all once more?”

“We can,” was Matthai Reese’s short response.

There was a small smile on the old man’s face.

“We definitely can.”

Suddenly, Matthai Reese started to frown. Immediately afterwards, a stabbing headache spread from his temples to the inside of his skull. He was in a vault of knowledge pure enough that Index Librorum Prohibitorum was invited into it. Even for the former pope, viewing that knowledge for a long period of time brought a deep negative effect on his body and mind.

“We can still do it,” Matthai Reese said while holding a hand out to drive back the young priest who was attempting to see if he was okay. “We can still fight. In order to open up the path to a hope-filled tomorrow, we cannot stop here.”

However, it was true that he was worried.

The secret ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church and the wisdom of the Russian Orthodox Church.

If they used the techniques used in the Star of Bethlehem against it, they would be able to severely damage it.

However, it was not clear if they could actually bring it down.

After all…

(Those are not the only techniques being used…)

He had received word that Fiamma of the Right had stolen the remote control spiritual item for Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

That meant that the Star of Bethlehem might not only be using Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox techniques.

The final key was…

“The Anglican Archbishop, hm?”

“Hey, hey. Do you want to play a game of rock-paper-scissors to see who has to speak with that trickster of a woman?”

At that time, Sasha Kreutzev pulled many different tools from the belt at her waist while standing within the Star of Bethlehem that floated above Russia. She scraped an L-shaped crowbar along the floor to draw a gigantic magic circle.

Lessar was hurriedly preparing the escape containers.

There were many metal container-like objects with large parachutes on them hanging down from the bottom of the fortress. Lessar was preparing them for use.

In addition to those two girls, over 200 Russian Orthodox magicians that had been cast aside by Fiamma were there. They had to be allowed to escape to the surface before Fiamma disposed of them.

And even if Fiamma was defeated, they still needed a means of escape.

They were over 10,000 meters up in the air after all.

“Wait! I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but the ‘last bus’ is about to leave!!”

“My first response: I am not here because I wish to be. A supplementary explanation: I truly wish to get away from here as quickly as I can.” Sasha’s hands manipulating her tools did not stop as she spoke. “My personal opinion: However, I also am resistant to fleeing without doing anything. The only one actually opposing Fiamma right now is that boy. As a professional magician, I must at least support him even if it is useless resistance.”

“How!?”

“My second response: Fiamma used my body to call in Gabriel and to change a section of the sky into the environment he wished for. …As such, I may have become a major factor that can drive a wedge into Fiamma’s plan.”

She did not know how much of an effect she could produce.

At the very least, it was impossible for Sasha Kreutzev’s actions alone to bring Fiamma’s huge plan to a standstill.

However, she still had to do it.

Sasha’s gaze did not waver as it lay hidden behind her bangs.

Lessar scratched at her hair.

“Ahh, dammit!! Then I’ll help you finish this as quickly as possible!!”

“?”

“I too was thinking about sticking around to the very last possible second. That boy seems like he will be beneficial to England, so I’ll help you out just to kill some time.”

“My third response: You do not need to go that far…”

“Either way, our escape plan has been temporarily stopped since you have decided to do this.”

Lessar used her thumb to point behind herself.

The Russian Orthodox magicians were getting out of their escape containers and approaching.

They were approaching to help spread the complex magic circle Sasha was trying to draw.

Sasha was shocked, but Lessar grinned in her direction and spoke.

“Now this flow will not change until we get some kind of result, so let’s fight back against Fiamma’s plan.”

At that time, a group of girls dressed in mainly black nun's habits were travelling across a snowy plain of Russia at high speed.

Their clothes looked like those of the Roman Catholic Church, but they were currently not affiliated with that church.

They were the former Agnese Forces.

Those 200 nuns were headed for a place where both Academy City and Russian soldiers were collapsed.

Fighting did not necessarily mean to kill one’s enemies.

They had their own way of fighting.

“Sister Agnese, we have spotted people needing to be rescued. It is impossible to get them all out of the effective range of the explosions. As planned, shelters need to be built at points calculated from the distribution map of those needing to be rescued!!”

“Listen up, Sister Angelene. The shelters use the theory of the swaddling clothes and manger of the Son of God! Order each of the nuns skilled in the use of Divine Mother-style Ex Voto to set up shelters!!”

“The large rescue helicopters are on standby 3000 meters back! Have them transport the heavily wounded out before the next explosion!!”

“Get the lightly wounded to one of the shelters! We do not have time to transport them all out!!”

It all happened in no time at all.

What they were referring to as shelters were nothing more than tent-like objects made of a wooden framework and a large white cloth. However, they were still not objects that could be constructed in a dozen or so seconds. To those watching on who had no idea what was going on, it may have looked like the shelters were spring-loaded toys that automatically expanded.

Collapsed soldiers who were unable to move were taken one after another to the shelters created in the middle of the battlefield.

Surprisingly, both the Academy City and Russian soldiers were treated in this way.

They were all humans who held the same feelings toward that one situation.

If they had all realized that earlier, such a showy war may not have occurred in the first place.

“…Who are you?”

Those words were squeezed out by a man who had been controlling an Academy City powered suit.

He asked his questions even as he had bandages wrapped around his body.

“Whose side are you on…?”

“We did not come all this way to discuss that,” responded a girl in a black nun’s habit. “If I must respond, I will say that our only goal is to reduce the number of injuries in this war as much as possible.”

“…”

The nun was using medicines made of plants rather than the usual antibiotics and the soldier was at a loss for words. As if to fill that silence, a communication reached the shelter of wood and cloth.

The soldier could not see any kind of equipment.

A male voice came from what looked like a card that was stuck to one of the shelter’s pillars.

“Really now. I knew Fiamma loved to keep things clean, but I never thought he would try to clean things on such a large scale.”

“So this really is part of Fiamma’s purification plan?”

“It would be best to assume it is. He’s destroying the status quo and producing

the materials needed to recreate it all. …However, new materials that no human can destroy and therefore cannot be manufactured by anyone are nothing more than giant pieces of garbage."

A sharp yet heavy vibration shook the snowy plain.

Immediately afterwards, a golden arm protruded up from the ground nearby.

The Academy City man lying in a bed grimaced in pain and sat up. A Russian soldier in the bed next to him did the same.

"Dammit, hand me my gun," the man said with a groan as he stretched one hand out toward a nun. "I can't let this end without fighting back. I don't know who's doing this, but you're clearly good people since you've helped us out. I'll give you enough of an opening to escape."

However, there was no need for the Academy City or Russian soldiers to make a suicide attack on the arm.

They were not even given the time to do so.

Almost an instant later, a single long sword severed the golden arm at its base.

A majestic form could be seen through a gap in the cloth forming the simple tent-like shelter.

The Asian girl wielding a katana over 2 meters long was strange, but it was even stranger that she had been able to slice apart that golden arm in a single strike.

The golden arm was over 100 meters long and thick enough to match. Even if that 2 meter sword had a tremendously sharp blade, it should not have been able to sever that golden arm simply due to its thickness.

And yet…

"Basically, it's the same concept as opening a slit in a plastic bag," said a female voice from the card-shaped communication device on the pillar. "You create a small wound on the target and then let the weight of the target force the slit wider. It is a required skill in the many legends of dragons and other beasts being sliced through with a sword that is clearly smaller than the beast."

The Academy City man was in shock and his body was covered in light from an old form of illumination called a torch that a nun wearing black was holding. A circle of light as if from a flashlight crept across his body. He thought she was checking for injuries, but something was odd. Even after the circle of light passed over parts of his body, his body's surface glowed palely.

It was as if his body was being supported from without.

"Whether you plan to live on or block the way before a powerful enemy, you must first be able to move your body."

As he received medical treatment, the Academy City man recalled the situation outside of the shelter.

He tried to remember as accurately as possible where the still functioning tanks and powered suits were.

Before long, the man had completed his preparations to head out to attack.

This time, his enemy was not the Russian army.

At that time, two swords severed giant gold arms growing from the surface.

One was a sword of light extending from a shard of the British blade Curtana Second.

The other was the French blade Durendal.

Using those blades were the representatives of each country, Second Princess Carissa and the Femme Fatale. Their wounds from the Archangel Misha Kreutzev had not been healed, but there was no sign of weakness in their actions.

"First an angel and now the symbol of the right arm. That bastard is obsessed with Telesma, isn't he?" said Carissa in a disinterested manner as she swung her sword of light. "Move the Mobile Fortress Glastonbury from Deployment B to Deployment C. Check how it's doing. A malfunction here would be a real pain in the ass."

“…If you removed the altitude limitation on Glastonbury, you could probably reach Fiamma’s temple a lot faster.”

The Femme Fatale looked up into the sky. 10,000 meters up above her was the fortress known as the Star of Bethlehem.

“If it was that easy, we wouldn’t be going to all this trouble. Glastonbury was developed to conquer areas along the surface. It is not meant to be used in high altitude battles in the sky.”

Carissa turned back toward Glastonbury.

“The Star of Bethlehem, hm? I’m surprised the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church were willing to disclose that information.”

“They were both used. All this means is that neither of them are so beyond saving that they would just stand by and allow a plan like this to happen.”

The Femme Fatale lightly swung her sword around by moving only her wrist and began to think.

(Come to think of it, my little sister’s country is in this area, isn’t it?)

She then arbitrarily punctuated her thoughts with a “hm”.

(If I get her to owe me a favor, it could lead to France’s benefit.)

(Hey, sister. I would rather one of the representatives of Western Europe did not plot to take things from a smaller country. It’s childish.)

(Oh, Eliza. It’s polite to knock before entering.)

(You are within range of my bombardment spell.)

(If you were truly that skilled, I do not think the French government would have recognized your secession.)

(That area was originally intended to be a battlefield on which to fight Fiamma, so my soldiers have set up all sorts of dangerous things. In the end, Fiamma invaded and stole Sasha Kreutzev before we were able to use it, but my

bombardment spell can still reach that point.)

(Are you hoping to get me to owe you a favor?)

(Don’t you think it is more natural for a small country to take things from a representative of Western Europe?)

Sparks flew between those sisters.

And then Carissa seemed to receive a transmission. However, it was not from a magical means of communication. In response to an electronic tone, the second princess pulled a radio out from her cleavage.

The Femme Fatale looked at Carissa like she was looking at indecent lingerie.

“…I’ve asked you this many, many, many times before, but is it really necessary to store that there?”

“Shut up. What are you, my mother? …Unfortunately, this dress has nothing remotely like pockets. I hope you have enough sense to tell whether it is better to do this or clip it to my panties.”

Carissa spoke into the radio and seemed to be talking with someone in London.

“I see, I see. So that’s it. In other words, the techniques and knowledge of the Anglican Church are needed in addition to those of the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church in order to bring down the Star of Bethlehem.”

The second princess gave multiple quick nods.

“In that case, tell this to the head of the Anglican Church: If you do not immediately disclose the necessary information, Second Princess Carissa of the Royal Family and of military matters will shove Curtana up your ass.”

Having said what she needed to say, Carissa cut off the transmission.

“It seems the preparations to bring it down are underway. However, just waiting for that to happen will only let the damage increase.”

“So you are saying there is only one thing we must do?”

The two women once more held their legendary-class swords at the ready.

A number of golden arms appeared from the ground as if surrounding them.

Standing back to back, they spoke.

“There is a way to obstruct Fiamma’s plan without directly attacking the Star of Bethlehem.”

“…And that is to destroy every single golden arm that appears on the surface, right?”

Multiple cutting strikes flew and the surrounding arms were destroyed in an instant.

The knights, Necessarius, and the French magicians followed suit.

Their invasion began.

At that time, a thin Western sword made of something like particles of light mercilessly pierced through Stiyl Magnus’s shoulder and into his chest as he stood within St. George’s Cathedral in England. The sword was the sword of the harvest god Freyr. It was a spiritual item that moved automatically and surely stabbed into its opponent’s vitals. It cut through Stiyl’s collarbone and ripped through thick arteries and organs.

The expression on the girl named Index’s face remained frozen.

Stiyl’s movements stopped.

And in that time, multiple attacks continued on.

Another two swords stabbed into Stiyl’s back and waist and blood red wings swung down as if to finish him off. The attacks were simply overwhelming. The repeated attacks crushed human flesh while also causing fatal damage to the life force that was the source of magic power.

However, Index's expressionless face tilted ever so slightly to the side in confusion.

The multiple blades and wings had definitely slid into Stiyl's body. However, there was no other change. It had been too smooth. No blood was shed and no flesh was crushed. The human body was not cut apart as easily as a spoon dipping into yogurt.

Her conclusion came too late.

By the time she realized it was a magical trick, the next move had already been taken.

"It is a mirage. It's a common method," said a voice behind her.

She then noticed something odd in the area of her spine.

Immediately afterwards, an explosive noise as if from a strike of lightning exploded out. Stiyl had activated the restraining rune card he had put on her.

Index's backbone creaked as it bent like a bow.

"Warning: Chapter 47, Verse 80. Restraining effect on mind and body due to a psychological effect has been confirmed. It is affecting mental functions. Leading the restraining effect to a dummy area and putting priority on maintaining ability to analyze spells."

The rune on the laminated card started to fade like a poster that had been left in the sun for long periods of time. The important "staining" of the rune was being removed. Of course, once that coloration disappeared, its effects would disappear too. It would not last long.

(…She may have been weakened by the interruption from the remote control spiritual item, but she is still the library of 103,000 grimoires. I did not think that this would be enough to seal her.)

What he had managed to do was buy some time.

At a fundamental level, Stiyl Magnus could not defeat Index.

However…

“I do not mind.” With a small smile on his face, Stiyl pulled a new rune card from his pocket. “If that annoying boy can finish things in this time, we win.”

He then heard a footstep.

Stiyl looked over to find Laura Stuart smiling.

She was lightly swinging around something in her hand.

At first Stiyl thought it was the remote control spiritual item and his eyes opened wide in shock, but that was not what it was.

Laura was holding a card-shaped communications spiritual item.

“Here’s your reward,” she said.

She brought that communications spiritual item that was connected to the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church close to her lips.

“Well, it seems the quota has been met, so I will aid in the retrieval of the grimoire library as well.”

And so the three major Christian denominations, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church, finally joined forces.

They had a single objective.

Fiamma of the Right’s castle known as the Star of Bethlehem would be robbed of its power in order to stop any more atrocities from occurring.

They began to move in order to tear off the chains that were binding the world.

Kamijou Touma and Fiamma of the Right wielded their respective arms.

Multiple shockwaves shook the area, and the magical aftereffects turned into a flood of light that scattered about. Besides the direct clashes, light flashed intermittently around them and blood red beams of light were fired in multiple directions. It was an attack using the 103,000 grimoires.

However, their clashes were not equal.

Bit by bit with each collision, power left Fiamma's third arm as if a sharp beak were pecking at soft flesh. Fiamma's arm had gained special flesh via various ceremonies, but it was clearly becoming battered and crushed.

Kamijou's power was not anything special.

The source of the power supporting Fiamma of the Right was breaking.

Fiamma wondered why.

His third arm was supposed to produce tremendous power, but its output was falling bit by bit. Cracks were running through the Star of Bethlehem that he had constructed from the important parts of churches and cathedrals from all across the world. It was also losing its natural glow. The earth was supposed to change in the same way as the golden heavens, but even after so much time, it had not been conquered. In fact, something like small bits of contamination were appearing here and there in the golden heavens. Something was wrong. It was the same as how a single gear ceasing to move could obstruct the movement of all sorts of mechanisms.

Nothing was going as he wanted.

At that rate, he would no longer be able to catch up.

Fiamma was trying to release more power than was being supplied to him which effectively weakened him.

"Oooooohhhhhhhh!!!!!!"

Fiamma yelled and swung his third arm even stronger and faster.

However, he himself realized there was a contradiction in that action. His arm was supposed to be almighty. If he swung it, it would hit, so he had no need for

speed. If he hit, the target would be destroyed, so he had no need for destructive power. And yet Fiamma was now relying on simple arm strength. That was proof that the essence that should reside within his arm had been shaken.

There was a low vibration.

The entirety of the Star of Bethlehem shook. However, it had not been caused by the battle between Kamijou and Fiamma. The vibration had been completely independent of them. The fortress itself was headed for destruction.

The speakers within the fortress activated on their own.

Fiamma did not know it, but the voice that came through belonged to a girl named Lessar.

“The Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Russian Orthodox churches have begun to release the joint spells on the Star of Bethlehem! Um…Sasha Kreutzev of the Russian Orthodox Church and I have embedded a relay point for the releasing spell and are now getting aboard the escape containers. There are no more containers! You need to hurry!!”

Once more, an irregularity Fiamma of the Right had not even considered was damaging his plan.

That irregularity was known as virtue.

“It’s over, Fiamma,” Kamijou said quietly as he brought his right fist up at the ready. “Your right arm that is at the center of your plan is losing power and your ceremonial grounds you call the Star of Bethlehem is no longer usable. And most importantly, if you truly wanted to save the world, you would be rejoicing at the fact that the virtue within people’s hearts is winning out over the malice. …The fact that you cannot do that shows that your illusion has already failed.”

“True,” Fiamma said with a slight laugh. “I am at the disadvantage here. Now that the power at my base is weakening, my plan cannot be continued. The purification on the earth is grinding to a halt. …Even if I swung my right arm now while it is rapidly losing power, it is unlikely I could take those on the earth down with me. If everything stays the way it is, it will all fall apart in this indefinite state.”

“…”

“Yes, *if everything stays the way it is*.”

Fiamma’s words were ominous.

Immediately afterwards, the golden heavens above their heads wavered. Shading appeared in the glowing heavens. All at once, a mass of light headed for the Star of Bethlehem. Masses of energy appeared one after another in rapid succession and focused on the inside of the Star of Bethlehem.

Kamijou’s expression changed and Fiamma lightly swung around the remote control spiritual item.

“Just so you know, I did not use this. This is the result you all brought upon yourselves.”

“What…?”

“I did not obtain anyone else’s help. Time was simply on my side,” Fiamma said.

He had not opened the gate of heaven. He was simply such a holy existence that the world around him changed to become like heaven.

The change had continued with time and it had now passed a certain line.

“It was originally supposed to change bit by bit in stages, but this ‘virtue’ continually prevented that from happening. As a result, an unnatural distortion was created between the heavens and the earth similar to power being stored up within a bent continental plate.”

Even then, a massive amount of power was flowing into the Star of Bethlehem. If that exceeded the limit of what the fortress could hold, it would no longer be able to hold back the amount left over.

“As a result, the heavens are filled with Telesma while the earth is not. That massive power will now rain down like the flowing of an electric current. … Simply put, the earth will be filled with light. It is via a different route than I had intended, but the result will be the same. The change is still continuing in this world.”

“Do you understand what is going to happen?” Kamijou said while grinding his teeth. “That’s a huge mass of the same energy that makes up an angel’s body. If that falls down to the earth, a ridiculously huge explosion will spread across the surface before any kind of change can take place!! It was the same with Misha during Angel Fall. If power that massive is allowed to rage without being controlled, it could easily destroy all of human civilization!!”

“Yes, it is unfortunate, but only for you. Given the amount of power, at least the entire continent of Eurasia will be enveloped by the light.”

Fiamma’s gaze still held power.

That was the first time Kamijou had seen the concept of refusing to give up show itself in such an evil way.

“Even if a bit of virtue showed itself amid this war, overwhelming destruction will blot it out from above. Wielding virtue is no use. You cannot stop tragedy that way and the despair that comes over you upon realizing that turns your malice into something much deeper and heavier than it was before.”

And the mass of highly concentrated malice that was created by giving up gave a large stimulus to the power within Fiamma. It was much greater than before. It was much stronger than what Fiamma had simulated it would be. He stood at the top of every living thing on that planet and he could wield that power to change the world in any way he saw fit.

“Overly powerful divine punishment can easily destroy the unions between people. It is the same as the bonds between people being broken with the destruction of the Tower of Babel. And in response to the malice created in that, I can once more draw on a tremendous power.”

“…Fiamma…”

“It is too late to save the world in your way,” Fiamma said with a smile on his face as he saw Kamijou clenching his fist tighter than ever before.

That smile was an expression of calm created by his newly guaranteed supply of tremendous power.

“Now, victory is mine.”

Between the lines 8

After sticking some cloth into the slight depression that was like a small window on the side of the Nu-AD1967 warhead, Mikoto finally sighed.

“…Pant pant. Now the warhead has finally been neutralized. If they end up having an ultrasonic remote control, we could be in trouble though.”

“From the confusion over the transmissions, it seems they do not have another plan, reports Misaka. They seem to be panicking over the fact that nothing is happening, says Mikoto adding on some emotional information.”

“Do you think they’ll come up with another plan?”

“With the active unit gone, it seems they will switch over to fleeing, predicts Misaka. They do not have the remaining strength needed to carry a warhead of this size, so they will likely abandon the nuclear weapon, says Misaka as she listens to the communications.”

“But just leaving them be could come back to bite us in the ass.”

“A different faction of the Russian military seems to have come to that same conclusion. Special forces have surrounded those officers, says Misaka as she intercepts different communications. They will be stopping them with a special suppression strategy once they leave the building, reports Misaka.”

“The special forces must not be heading into the building themselves because they don’t want the officers to feel cornered enough to detonate the nuclear bomb. That isn’t something that can be promptly detonated in a vehicle or something.”

Mikoto pushed away the cloth and then pressed against the end of the shovel the Sister threw to her. It had been mounted on the body of a tank. Mikoto manipulated magnetism to smash the reinforced glass over the optical receiver.

“Then we just have to destroy the warhead’s connectors.”

After destroying the three points that connected to the computer, Mikoto turned back toward the Sister.

“Okay, all done. Now this warhead can’t be used. Of course, that would change if someone put it in a different outer shell.”

“The warhead alone weighs 2 tons, so it cannot be moved without a crane, predicts Misaka.”

“Just in case, we should tell either the Russian authorities or Academy City about this spot.”

For the moment, the problems surrounding the nuclear weapon had been resolved.

That was when things truly began.

Misaka Mikoto had not come to Russia to do something like that. She had come to meet up with that spiky-haired boy and punch him.

She spun around looking at her surroundings.

“You have the means of using all sorts of weapons installed in you, right?”

“If necessary, Misaka can also use the Misaka Network to acquire additional information, says Misaka as she discusses with the other Misakas how she should negotiate her part-time job wages.”

“You can’t get paid until you’re in high school, so you’re working for free.”

“…Aren’t you getting your priorities backwards?”

Mikoto pointed in a certain direction ignoring the Sister’s mumbled words.

“I don’t know if they were going to use it as a weapon or as a means of transportation, but there is a VTOL craft over there. Can’t we use that to fly up to that fortress in the heavens?”

Notes

1. ↑ Raikiri means Lightning Cutter

Chapter 12: Final Battle at the Arctic Ocean.
Last_Fight.

Part 1

The white snowy plain was wrapped in silence.

Accelerator's song had ended. The end of the cane supporting his body slipped. Accelerator's entire body was covered in red blood as he fell from his knees. That white hell would not allow its color to be changed, so he alone was dyed in the colors of his wounds and pain.

His throat had exceeded its limit and his raspy breaths made it sound like his throat had been scraped over with a filed. He must have been injured internally as well because a red liquid occasionally flowed out with his breaths.

He could not sing any longer.

The tubes within his body had something sticky filling them up.

However, Accelerator's dark red-stained lips loosened a bit.

(That's right.)

He did not need to sing any longer. After all…

"…Are you okay?...says Misaka as Misaka asks a question."

His vision was hazy, but he heard that small voice.

Those words came from the girl whose voice he had wanted to hear for quite some time. That sentence had been spoken by the girl who just before could not

maintain consciousness and whose life could not be guaranteed. Her voice was quiet, but Accelerator could tell she had retained her core.

Her existence was a trembling one that could disappear at any time and was frighteningly unreliable, but now a pillar that would not disappear had been set up at its center.

Last Order had been stabilized.

She would no longer suffer at the hands of unreasonable violence.

Accelerator reflected deeply upon that truth. The next thing he knew, he was moving. The Level 5 who had once been called Academy City's strongest monster stretched out his trembling hands and embraced Last Order's small body that was still limp and without strength.

He embraced her tightly.

He embraced her so as to never let her go again.

"…Thank goodness…"

Those words leaked from his mouth.

His voice was trembling and not just because the inside of his body had been torn to shreds.

"Dammit. Thank goodness. Thank goodness…!!"

One would not have thought that it was in Accelerator's nature to speak those words.

However, what exactly was Accelerator's "nature"? Perhaps this was who he truly was. Perhaps before all the tragedy and before Academy City's darkness swallowed up that young Level 5, his nature had been that of a child that commonly smiled and commonly cried.

Even after being overwhelmingly dyed in evil, that had remained unchanged within Accelerator.

It had remained.

Perhaps that was what Yoshikawa Kikyou and Yomikawa Aiho had seen and decided that the society of adults needed to protect.

As Last Order had only been conscious intermittently for quite a while, she did not know the details of the situation.

But that did not matter.

As Accelerator embraced her, Last Order brought her small hands around to his back where she gently stroked him.

She was accepting him.

Most likely, it was the same as when she had first spotted what remained within him.

"…"

Accelerator thought as he made sure of that warmth he had finally regained.

It was true that the world was cold, harsh, and too filled with malice to do anything about.

However, there was also salvation there.

If you just stretched out your own hand…if you simply gritted your teeth and continued forward, there was definitely a light that would await you after you struggled and struggled and struggled. The world was not so hopeless that it even robbed you of that ray of light.

"Misaka apologizes for interrupting this emotional reunion," Misaka Worst said with thorns of warning in her tone, "but it doesn't look like this god damn war is going to have a happy ending to it."

Accelerator felt something was wrong before he even turned his head to check on his surroundings.

He had an unpleasant feeling like something cold was piercing into him through

all the skin on his body. No, perhaps it was the opposite of that. It may have been that the trembling within his body was flowing out through his skin. It did not matter which it was. At any rate, it was not coming from his usual 5 senses. It felt like his body's sensors and the calculative circuits in his brain were malfunctioning because he was forcibly taking in information he was not supposed to be able to take in.

He could feel an immense pressure coming from above.

It felt like an incredibly concentrated form of what was emitted by Unabara Mitsuki, the water angel, and those parchments.

Accelerator looked up into the heavens while still embracing Last Order.

A giant fortress was floating there.

The golden light filling the sky was being swallowed up by the fortress. Accelerator thought he could feel the pressure of that immense power that was concentrating in one spot. He could feel where it was aimed. That mass of unknown power was being aimed at the earth.

He had no idea what meaning that fortress had.

He did not understand what effect sending that power to the earth would have.

However…

"…I doubt anything good would come of firing that."

It was possible whoever was firing it was not after simple destruction. Perhaps it could produce some kind of special effect. Even so, the result would be the same. If power that great was sent down to the earth, how far would the damage spread? And if he assumed it was something other than a purely scientific energy due to the feeling in his skin, Accelerator could not reflect it.

If it made it through, everyone would die.

Accelerator, Misaka Worst, Last Order…everyone.

"…Fuck that."

Immediately after he muttered those words, there was a sound like an explosion and wings that were black like ink erupted from Accelerator's back. Those black wings were the symbol of his anger. That tremendous power was full of mysteries. He doubted it was created simply with the help of the Misaka Network and he had no idea if Last Order could forcibly shut it down. Whenever those wings had appeared, Accelerator had been in a state where he had pretty much completely lost his mental balance. They appeared when he simply wished to kill the enemy before his eyes even if it meant casting aside everything he believed in. The killer intent erupting from his chest had trampled over the world in the form of those black wings. That was the kind of power it was.

It was as if the wings had been squeezed from his body by the pressure from the fortress in the heavens.

It was just like when he had confronted Aiwass.

However…

"…Misaka Worst." Accelerator's words were as quiet as a whisper. "I am going to stop that. Can you protect that brat?"

"From the Russians? Or from Academy City?"

"From everything."

Misaka Worst sighed at that ridiculous order. Making an enemy of both sides was essentially the same as telling her to fight every single force taking part in World War III.

However, she pulled a metal nail out of her pocket with a malice-filled smile on her face.

"Well, Misaka was going to bring them to tears anyway, so this does not change what she must do. And if we can analyze the information from the song within Last Order and the Misaka Network, we might be blessed with a chance to obtain technology that Academy City does not have."

Last Order may have felt uneasy at the confusing situation that was developing around her. Her small hands grabbed onto Accelerator's clothes.

“Where are you going? says Misaka as Misaka asks a question.”

Her eyes wavered as she looked up from within his arms.

Most likely, she understood what Accelerator was about to do. And because she understood, she was trying to stop him.

“You’re not going anywhere, right? says Misaka as Misaka checks to be sure.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll all be over soon.”

Accelerator did not say that he would be back or that he would be returning.

The monster with the black wings gently removed the small hands from his clothes one finger at a time. It was as if he were shaking off the final bonds that kept him anchored to the surface.

“No,” said Last Order in a small voice. “I want to always be with you, says Misaka as Misaka begs you.”

“…Yes.”

Accelerator admitted it.

In the very, very end, he responded with a childlike smile on his face.

“I wanted to always be with you, too.”

With a sound like cracks spreading across ice, the monster’s wings changed color. The ink-like pitch black changed to a snow-like pure white. Starting from the base and spreading to the tips, the outer color and the inner essence all changed in an instant.

Just above his head, a small ring of the same color appeared.

That was his transformation.

With that mental change, he became a source that spewed forth a unique power into the real world.

Accelerator put his hands on Last Order’s small shoulders, lightly pushed, and floated up into the sky due to the recoil like an astronaut in zero gravity.

Last Order’s small hands stretched up into the sky toward Accelerator.

But she could not reach him.

Accelerator was already floating a few meters up.

Convinced that he had done the right thing, Accelerator flapped his white wings. His 100 meter wings used more than just the power of the wind. They also converted some more unknown energy into lift. He emitted no force down at the earth, but he still shot up like a bullet.

In an instant, Accelerator reached a point 3000 meters up and scattered the thick clouds that were hanging in the sky.

At the same time, the fortress in the heavens made its move.

The mass of golden power that was being taken in from above and stored underneath was mercilessly thrown downwards. Accelerator could feel the pressure on his cheek as a stinging numbness. Just like his white wings, that

power truly was not a normal power. Most likely, his reflection would not work on it. It would just pierce straight through like when he had been defeated by Aiwass.

But so what?

Accelerator moved his white wings even more and his speed of ascent shot up. With no tricks up his sleeve, he headed straight for the falling golden mass. There was a slight smile on his lips.

(I see.)

Accelerator finally realized it.

(So this is what a fight to protect something is like.)

Immediately afterwards, the two massive powers clashed at an altitude of 8000 meters.

Part 2

A tremendous shock shook the Star of Bethlehem.

The golden light had exploded.

“What…?”

But a great disaster did not assault the earth as Fiamma of the Right had expected. Nor was the earth dyed gold like the heavens. The great amount of Telesma that was fired down from the Star of Bethlehem was obstructed by something.

“That should have reached the necessary output!! That should have created the amount of destruction on the earth needed to complete the conditions for my strategy effectively supporting my victory!! What happened…!?”

The tragedy he wished for had not occurred.

Instead of recognizing the increase in malice, the tragedy had been held in check which had wiped the dark parts from the people's hearts.

It may have been nothing more than a temporary excited feverishness similar to the global unity felt only during a sports festival.

But even if it was only for a moment, the people of the earth felt that they were all the world needed.

They felt that anyone offering salvation while looking down on them should just fuck off.

"Is that enough for you?"

Kamijou Touma stepped forward with his fist still clenched.

He took one, two, three steps.

"It's time for you to give it a rest with this illusion of yours."

He suddenly charged forward.

He did not need any tricks. He just approached in a straight line from the front. In response, Fiamma of the Right used everything he had to swing around the third arm that was the symbol of his power. The tremendous power contained within it was too great for Imagine Breaker to negate. If Kamijou failed to turn aside its trajectory, he could pulverize the boy's entire right arm. That may have been what Fiamma was thinking as he tried to eliminate the obstacle before his eyes using brute force.

However, Kamijou did not stop.

The instant the attacking third arm struck his right fist head on, that oddly shaped arm that was Fiamma's greatest weapon was blown away.

Fresh blood and flesh flew through the air.

He had finally managed to have his third arm incarnated, but it now lost its

physical shell and trembled painfully in midair.

“What!?”

Intense pain must have assaulted him like an avalanche because the skin of his face became greatly distorted as he cried out.

Kamijou’s power had not been increased.

Imagine Breaker was nothing more than Imagine Breaker.

Fiamma’s third arm that responded to malice had been weakened to the point that it could be destroyed by even Imagine Breaker. Small pieces of virtue had spread like ripples until they had filled the entire surface of the earth effectively breaking the core that supported Fiamma’s power.

The power that made Fiamma of the Right special no longer existed.

It was doubtful whether he could use his direct attacks with his third arm or his evasion using instantaneous horizontal movement over kilometers.

Given that, he had no way of stopping Kamijou Touma’s advance.

“Tch!!”

Fiamma held out Index’s remote control spiritual item. He was trying to use the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires to intercept Kamijou. His defenses must have been weakened by the loss of his special power because a terrible headache stabbed into him, but he ignored it and continued searching through the knowledge. The light in his eyes said that he would kill the enemy before his eyes no matter what.

But then Fiamma heard a voice.

It was the voice of the grimoire library that he was supposed to be contacting magically.

(Warning: Chapter 88, Verse 1. An abnormality has occurred to the main body as it carries out the search. Due to receiving too great an external stimulus, operation efficiency has been significantly impeded.)

“…!?”

Index Librorum Prohibitorum’s main body should have been safely stored in St. George’s Cathedral. If an external stimulus had caused an error, an Anglican magician must have done something.

His final means of attack had been cut off.

That was the difference between the two of them.

That was the decisive difference between the one who continually refined his power as the one who would stand above all others, and the one who got help from others and continually struggled in an attempt to stand up to the one who stood above all others.

A mere high school student clenched his right fist and ran toward the king who controlled the world.

He headed deeply and sharply up to that throne where no one else had ever been allowed to get near.

That was when Kamijou’s footing suddenly sank.

The Star of Bethlehem was weakening.

With the power supply from Fiamma of the Right cut off, it had naturally begun to collapse.

In the very, very end the thing that had stopped Kamijou Touma’s legs from advancing was…

(Misfortune.)

Fiamma’s lips twisted up eerily.

He once more focused on the remote control spiritual item in his hand.

(I just need 5 to 10 seconds. In that time, I can forcibly rearrange the configuration of the grimoire library!! I don’t care if the high burden burns away the 103,000 grimoires. I just need to wash away the enemy before me!!)

“Oh…”

But Kamijou Touma’s advance did not stop there.

The boy yelled out and charged even further forward.

“Oooooohhhhh!!!!!”

With a great noise, Kamijou jumped from the footing that was even then about to crumble away.

He jumped to cross over the cracks separating the two of them.

He headed forward toward Fiamma like an arrow.

And then Fiamma knew.

He knew essentially what kind of existence the enemy before him was.

(Fuck that…)

Index's remote control spiritual item would not make it in time.

That enemy would not give him the time needed for that.

(I am trying to create various phenomena using the miracles and blessings of the Son of God to their fullest and this bastard doesn't care!? He has the power to just walk straight over all the vague things such as fortune and misfortune on his own!!)

"If you don't think even a single person can be saved without using your method…"

Words flowed from the bottom of Kamijou Touma's gut.

Instead of fighting against his fierce emotions, he put all of his strength into his right fist.

"…then I first need to destroy that illusion of yours!!"

A great noise exploded out.

Kamijou's fist slammed into Fiamma's face that had never once received an attack from anyone and Kamijou's powerful enemy was knocked to the ground with no loss in momentum.

The remains of the third arm that were trying to cling to that world finally completely disappeared as if melting into the air.

At the same time, the remote control spiritual item he had used to control Index fell from his hand.

Part 3

Fiamma of the Right losing his third arm had a major effect on his fortress, the Star of Bethlehem. Frequent large tremors stirred up unease even more than before. The fortress had been continually ascending, but it now stopped where it was. The source of power allowing that much mass to float was disappearing. At that rate, it would eventually start to fall. If he did not escape before then, there would be no saving him.

While collapsed on the ground, Fiamma looked at his own hand.

The remote control spiritual item was gone.

The shock of the punch had knocked it from his hand. The spiritual item had fallen through the cracks on the floor. It was probably still within the fortress, but Fiamma had no idea where.

If he only had that, he could fight back with normal magic.

Fiamma thought that, but he had no strength left in his arms or legs. Now that he had lost his third arm, Fiamma was no different from a normal human. A light concussion was enough to inhibit his movements.

He heard a voice in his dim consciousness.

It was coming from the speakers set up in various parts of the Star of Bethlehem.

“We had no time, so…um, Sasha-san was it?...anyway, she and I have already escaped using the containers. You need to hurry, too. The Star of Bethlehem has started to fall. The fortress itself is starting to wear down in places, so the number of usable containers is limited.”

Through the broken floor, he could see the bottommost floor of the fortress. After a few wire mesh floors, there was nothing but the sky below. The escape containers were hanging down below, but most of them were unusable. Some of the containers themselves had been crushed and some of the lowering hook portions had been destroyed preventing them from functioning.

There was probably only one usable container.

And that usable container that was unreliably shaking was a small one only about the size of a phone booth. It was not a large container that could carry over

50 people at a time. Only one person would be able to fit inside it. Having lost his third arm making him a mere human, Fiamma could not lower himself down from such a great height under his own strength.

Kamijou Touma and Fiamma of the Right.

Which one would get in the container and which one would be destroyed along with the fortress?

The answer was so obvious he did not even need to think about it.

(…So this is it.)

That was Fiamma's only thought.

If every person living in that world would reject salvation, he no longer cared. He had followed the path he had chosen for himself and he was fine with simply continuing on to his own destruction.

Strength slowly left his entire body and he closed his eyes.

And then someone grabbed his collar.

"Hey, let's go."

It was Kamijou Touma.

He forced Fiamma up with his bloody body and then started walking dragging Fiamma's limp body along with him.

"…What are you…doing…?"

"We don't have time. The Star of Bethlehem has started to fall. If we don't escape, we'll get wrapped up in its destruction."

"Do you not understand the situation?" Fiamma said while completely at Kamijou's mercy.

He used his chin to point in the direction Kamijou was headed.

"The escape containers are unusable. Only a single personal one is in a state

where it might be functional. It’s either me or you. Only one of us will be saved.”

“So it seems.” Kamijou sighed and then continued speaking. “So you need to escape. At any rate, we don’t have time, so let’s hurry.”

“…”

This time, Fiamma was simply left speechless and he stared at Kamijou’s face.

As he did so, Kamijou dragged Fiamma down to the bottommost floor and headed for the escape container.

Kamijou was serious.

There was no reason to make a bluff in that situation. If he simply abandoned Fiamma, the man behind it all, and got in the escape container, Kamijou would survive. He would become known as a hero by everyone. No one would criticize him for leaving Fiamma to die. In fact, most people would likely praise him for finishing off the man who had caused all that tragedy.

And yet…

Why would he say those words in that situation?

No matter how many times he thought through it, Fiamma could not figure out the answer. And while he still had no answer, they arrived at the escape container. Kamijou very carefully reached his hand out for the container door. The container was not destroyed by his right hand’s power.

Kamijou opened the door and put Fiamma inside the container without any hesitation.

It was not normal.

Fiamma tried to slip out of the container, but his body was too badly damaged to move.

Fiamma shook his head without even thinking.

He himself did not understand what he was trying to deny.

“…Is this really okay?”

“Is what?”

“I am a person who does not understand just how vast the world is.”

“I see,” said Kamijou with a slight smile.

Until the end, Fiamma did not understand why he was smiling.

“Then go find out on your own from now on.”

Kamijou locked the container door from the outside. Immediately afterwards, the container slid down a short rail and was thrown out into the sky.

For a bit, Kamijou watched the container grow smaller as it fell.

Finally, he lifted up his gaze as if he were shaking it free of the container.

The final container had been ejected.

There was no longer any safe way of escaping from the fortress.

Suddenly, he heard a great roar. The direction of the raging wind changed. Kamijou instinctually covered his face with his hands and then spotted a single fighter. It was a type of aircraft called a VTOL craft that could rise vertically and come to a stop in midair like a helicopter.

He recognized the person sitting in the cockpit.

It was…

Part 4

“More to the right!! A little more!! Get closer!!”

While leaning forward from the back seat, Misaka Mikoto was shouting at the Sister holding the stick.

Finally.

She had finally made it there.

She had made it to the same time and same space as that idiot!!

“Original, that grin is creepy, points out Misaka.”

“Bfh!? N-no it isn’t!! Your judgment has become skewed due to you being the comparison!!” Mikoto frantically pulled on her cheeks to check on her face. “Aahhh!! What is going on!? It was floating up just a bit ago, so why is that fortress starting to fall!?”

“Misaka apologizes for interrupting you as you heat up, Original, but your voice cannot reach him if we do not open the cockpit canopy, points out Misaka.”

“How!? Which button do I press!?”

Just as she asked that, Mikoto had a sudden twinge of doubt.

They were over 10,000 meters up in the sky. The air would be below -50 degrees, the atmospheric pressure would be quite low, and there would be little oxygen. Was it really okay to just open the canopy?

If she did not open it, she could not reach him. But the conditions would not let her open it.

While Mikoto was overcome by that terrible dilemma, the Sister expressionlessly strained her ears.

“…There is something off with the roar of the engine, reports Misaka.”

“?”

“It is the conduction pattern of -7 degrees and 1 atmosphere, says Misaka after completing the definite calculations. How is unclear, but it appears the area

outside is being maintained as a similar environment to the surface despite being at an altitude of over 10,000 meters, says Misaka as she reports her conclusion."

"In other words…"

"It appears there would be no problem with opening the canopy, communicates Misaka."

Immediately afterwards, the canopy opened straight up like a rugby ball splitting in half vertically. It seemed the Sister had pressed the proper button.

As the Sister had said, Mikoto had no problem breathing. The air was cold, but it was not dozens of degrees below zero.

The Sister slowly moved the VTOL craft by tilting it slightly. Instead of pointing the nose toward the fortress, the craft approached vertically. In other words, the edge of the right main wing slowly approached.

Just a few more meters.

Or was it a few hundred centimeters?

Because the fortress was trembling unstably, the precise distance was irregularly changing.

However, she was remarkably closer than when she was hesitating in Academy City.

"This is the very limit…landing may be difficult, says Misaka as she grips the stick," said the Sister.

The fighter was completely frozen in midair.

It was just a bit away from reaching the fortress.

"The VTOL is meant to be used to slowly land, explains Misaka. If we forcibly land on this fortress that is moving up and down quite a bit, there is a risk of crashing the bottom of the body into the surface, says Misaka as she voices her concern."

“What about a larger spot? This fortress is huge. If we head farther up, surely we can find a space even larger than a pasture.”

“As the trembling of the fortress would remain the same, there is no avoiding the risk of crashing no matter where we try to land, says Misaka giving a negative opinion. And even if we did manage to land on the fortress, we would have no way of escaping if the fighter were to lose its flight capabilities, says Misaka as she frowns.”

“Then forget landing.” With the canopy still open, Mikoto reached for the buckle of her belt. “Keep our balance as much as you can! I’ll go directly out on the main wing and pull that idiot up!!”

Mikoto got up out of her seat and crawled out onto the main wing.

Perhaps because she was attaching her feet to the wing with magnetism, she was less afraid than she had expected.

She slowly advanced along the wing.

She was closing in on the spiky-haired boy.

(C’mon, reach him…)

A great tremor ran through the fortress.

It lowered in altitude.

The sense of stability from before was gone.

It was as if invisible strings holding up the fortress were snapping one by one. The shaking increased Mikoto’s anxiety.

(Reach him!!)

The VTOL craft with Mikoto stuck to its main wing shook as it slowly approached the fortress.

That was when her eyes met with that idiot’s.

That spiky-haired boy seemed to be utterly perplexed at seeing that escape

method appearing before him out of the blue. Deep down Mikoto wanted to say “What were you even planning to do, you idiot?”, but she did not have time to get after him about that. She would lecture him to death later.

Mikoto made it all the way out to the end of the wing and stretched her arms out as far as they would go.

Would she reach him? Or would she not?

Her fingertips made it to the point where they were on the verge of reaching.

But then the boy did something she had never expected.

He shook his head.

And then his hand, which he should have been holding out, stopped moving.

(Wha—!?)

Just as Mikoto’s eyes opened wide in surprise, the boy’s lips moved slightly.

She could not hear what he was saying.

However, she could tell what it was from the movement of his lips.

“I still have something I need to do.”

Another great tremor ran through the fortress. The fortress moved toward the earth much more and with much less stability than before. It was like a large ball rolling down a hill picking up enough speed that it could no longer be stopped. She had to retrieve that idiot from there. If things advanced more than that, she would no longer be able to reach him. Mikoto came to that conclusion mostly with her intuition.

But then the VTOL craft suddenly moved. It shook as if it were leaving the fortress.

“Wait!! What are you doing!?”

“The trembling of the fortress has passed beyond a certain point, reports Misaka. If we remain close to it, there is a danger of crashing into it.”

“…!!”

While still stuck to the trembling wing, Mikoto held out her hand and manipulated magnetism.

She didn’t care if she had to force him.

She would magnetically grab his school uniform’s buttons, his belt buckle, or whatever she could and pull that boy out of that fortress.

That was what she planned to do, but the magnetic thread connecting her and that boy suddenly snapped.

“Eh…?”

Mikoto stared blankly because she did not understand what had happened.

But immediately afterwards, she figured it out.

That boy had a mysterious power that could negate all of Mikoto’s abilities.

He had severed his final lifeline.

He had lost his final chance.

Even though she had the power to take on a tank and even though she had the power to stop the firing of a nuclear missile, it was not enough to save that one boy.

The VTOL craft distanced itself from the fortress that continued to unstably fall. The Sister greatly shook the fighter and Mikoto fell into the cockpit from the wing. She then closed the canopy. Immediately afterwards, the blessings of the mysterious field surrounding the fortress disappeared.

The reason was simple.

They had gotten that far away from the fortress.

And they had left behind that boy who had said he still had something he needed to do.

Misaka Mikoto’s cries were the only things that remained behind.

Part 5

(…I still have something I need to do.)

The VTOL craft flew away.

That fighter may have been his final means of escape.

But Kamijou turned his back on it.

It was not over yet.

If the structure named the Star of Bethlehem that had a radius of over 40 kilometers were allowed to free fall down, he had no idea how much damage would be done to the heavenly body known as the earth. As long as he had not done something about that, the war would not be over.

(And…)

Kamijou looked around in search of a certain object. It was the remote control spiritual item that could externally control Index. After the final strike, it had fallen somewhere through a crack in the floor. He had to find it and destroy it.

The fortress trembled below his feet.

The shaking agitated his unease like an elevator moving at a fixed speed suddenly stopping.

The fortress would not last much longer.

Just as Kamijou was reminded of that fact, he heard a girl’s voice.

He heard a voice on that fortress that no one else was supposed to be on.

“Touma.”

It was the voice he had wanted to hear for so long.

The remote control spiritual item had left Fiamma’s hand, but it must have still been functioning. The girl’s consciousness was no longer being held in anyone’s hands and it was drifting about in the area of the spiritual item.

“Touma.”

The girl’s transparent body appeared as if floating up from the air. Ignoring gravity, she looked at Kamijou while still upside down.

“Why didn’t you escape?” she said.

“Because none of this is over yet.”

After responding, Kamijou continued further into the Star of Bethlehem. He was not searching randomly. The girl’s existence was calling him toward the spiritual item he was searching for.

“Not only do I have to deal with your spiritual item, but I have to deal with this fortress itself.”

After saying that, Kamijou’s expression suddenly grew cloudy.

There was one thing that had not been resolved in the fight with Fiamma of the Right.

“…I’m sorry.”

That was the issue of his lost memories.

That was the issue of whether it had truly been right of him to continue to hide that fact from her.

He had not wanted to hurt Index. He had wanted to be the Kamijou Touma that she had trusted. But hadn’t that truly just been Kamijou himself not wanting to see Index’s shocked face? Hadn’t he just been afraid that she would leave him?

Now that the fight with Fiamma was over, he understood.

If he truly felt it had been for her sake, he would overcome it.

He would overcome the painful things, the difficult things, and everything else.

He could not be afraid of where he stood.

“I’ve done something terrible to you. I’ve been fooling you this whole time. I’ll tell you everything now. I have no proof that I’ll make it back from the Star of Bethlehem, so I’ll tell you while I can.”

Kamijou hung his head down just a bit.

But then he lifted his head up once more with determination.

“I…”

He would tell her.

He felt that opening his mouth for that purpose took more courage than anything he had ever done before.

“I…”

This was what he had been hiding for so long.

His memory loss.

He opened his mouth to tell that truth.

" -"

As he moved his mouth and spoke, Kamijou had one thought.

(It’s been so long.)

“It’s fine,” Index said as if interrupting him. “That…doesn’t matter anymore. As long as the usual you returns from this, nothing else matters.”

“…”

He fell silent for just a bit.

He strongly felt that he could not allow himself to become dependent on that kindness.

“I *will* come back.”

However, being strict with oneself and being pessimistic were two different things.

He would definitely return alive.

To make sure of that, Kamijou Touma made the following promise.

“I won’t just do this through the spiritual item. Once I return, I will make sure to bow down to you in person.”

Kamijou looked over at a panel on a nearby pillar. It was a communications device with a microphone so one could speak through the speakers set up in various places across the Star of Bethlehem. He could not read the Russian writing, but he could understand the numbers written next to it.

“Tell the Anglican Church that the frequency is 50.9 megahertz. That will connect to these speakers. I have no idea how much damage will be done if a mass this large just falls straight down. We have to lower its speed in stages and get it to fall somewhere safe. I’m the only one onboard, so I need advice on what to do.”

“I can’t,” said the girl in a troubled voice. “I can’t return to my body of my own will.”

“Yeah,” Kamijou replied readily.

He was staring at an annoying tube-shaped spiritual item lying on the floor.

“That’s why I’ll be sending you back ahead of me.”

He stretched out his right hand and grabbed the small tube-shaped spiritual item.

That was all it took.

The spiritual item crumbled and lost its power to bind that girl. Her transparent body disappeared as if an eraser had rubbed up against it.

He was now truly alone.

The Star of Bethlehem continued to fall. Its speed was gradually rising. Once it passed a certain point, there would be no preventing it from striking the surface of the earth at close to free fall.

That large mass with a radius of greater than 40 kilometers would directly strike the earth.

If that happened, the 21st century earth would prove that a meteorite strike could bring about an ice age. Some historians may rejoice at that, but for most people it would be nothing but a tragedy.

The final battle began.

What hung in the balance was the fate of the planet.

Part 6

“According to the information given by the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, the Star of Bethlehem floats in the sky using 20 large ascent spiritual items. Fiamma losing his power has started a chain reaction that is lowering the Star of Bethlehem’s output. At the current rate, it should completely lose all of its lift in an hour at which point it will be in a complete free fall toward the surface.”

Stiyl Magnus’s voice was coming from the speakers placed in various places around the fortress. He had been left with the role of guarding Index, but that role was over now that the remote control spiritual item had been destroyed.

“But by destroying specific ones out of those 20 large ascent spiritual items, we can control the orientation and travel direction of the Star of Bethlehem. And

your right hand is perfect for the job.”

“What are the specific points I have to destroy?”

“Just a second. I just got the diagram. It just shows the expected layout, so the actual thing may be different. If you notice anything out of place, tell me.”

Kamijou followed Stiyl’s instructions and travelled using the fortress’s monorail and then his own two feet when that did not suffice. He had no time left. If he failed, it would affect 6 billion lives.

“I’ll tell you the specific locations orally, but you need to destroy numbers 3, 9, and 13 in the south. That will change the Star of Bethlehem’s trajectory. You’ll be heading for the edge of the Arctic Ocean. By lowering the speed down to the very end and landing on the water, the shock should be done away with to a certain extent. Given the altitude and the mass, that is the only way to avoid doing serious damage to the global environment.”

“Won’t the speed of descent increase if we lower the number of large ascent spiritual items?”

“They have the same power source. The fewer of them there are, the more output each individual one will have. Of course, there is a limit to what a single one can do, but you don’t need to worry about that with the total power as weakened as it is. In fact, getting rid of a few of them might temporarily increase the output.”

“Could dropping it in the ocean cause a tsunami?”

“The cities along the Arctic coast have been given evacuation orders. It’s almost sickening how cooperative and helpful the Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Church have been. Otherwise, we would have had to realize there was a minimum level of unavoidable damages.”

As they spoke, Kamijou arrived at the #3 spiritual item.

It was like a factory.

A giant facility larger than a school’s grounds was divided into different lined up spaces that had dozens of thick pipes running through them. There were metal stairways and passageways coiling about the area. Kamijou caught occasional

glimpses of green particles of light that he thought might be what kept the giant fortress in the air.

Kamijou slammed his fist against a nearby pipe.

That was all it took. Countless cracks ran through the pipe, the rectangular stone building tilted, and plenty of flashy explosions occurred within. Kamijou got away so as not to get caught up in it all and ran toward the #9 spiritual item.

"…I never thought I would end up fighting alongside you in the very, very end," said Stiyl. "It didn't have to be me. We got bits and pieces of a report from that girl when she finally woke up. Her consciousness was in the Star of Bethlehem. Couldn't you have resolved this by relying on her knowledge?"

"You have to be kidding me. Do you really think I could let Index suffer like that for even a minute longer?"

"I see. It isn't my style to be indebted to someone like you, but just this once, I'll allow it."

"If you truly think that, then could you send a recovery team out near where I'm expected to land? I'd rather not have to wait in that freezing water."

"I'll make sure something is done about that," Stiyl responded quietly. "If the work on bringing the fortress down in stages is going well, you should survive the landing."

As they spoke, Kamijou was still desperately running through the Star of Bethlehem.

He was almost at the #9 spiritual item.

Kamijou felt that it was going to work out somehow. Everything about the great war that had started from a conflict with the Roman Catholic Church had been horrible, but it would all work out in the end. He would make sure it did. Kamijou focused on nothing but running ever forward while believing that to be true.

And then…

“What is that…?” said a panicked voice over the speakers.

Kamijou listened while continuing to run.

“This is odd. There is some kind of huge…Telesma? Why is that there…?”

Kamijou had a very bad feeling about what that meant.

But he could not stop. As Kamijou continued heading for the #9 spiritual item, Stiyl spoke.

“Why is Misha Kreutzev rising now!?”

Part 7

At that time, the archangel that had cooperated with Fiamma of the Right once more regained her body in that wintery land of Russia.

The fluctuation in the four great elements had been fixed by Fiamma. She was no longer Misha, a mix of Michael and Gabriel. She was now a genuine archangel. It was not wrong to say that her goal had been accomplished to a certain extent by that.

But it was not enough.

It was not perfect.

Her goal was to return her existence to its rightful position. Now that she had started to go off track, she could see nothing but that goal and was giving no thought to how much damage would be done in the process of carrying it out. She simply wished to return. For that reason and that reason alone, the archangel started to move once more.

The massive amount of Telesma that was scattered around the area gathered in one spot.

The archangel had been torn apart once by the power of the scientific monsters, but that had not harmed her essence. If you swung your fist down at the water, it would burst apart in a splash, but the actual amount of water would not lessen. It was the same as that.

But it was not enough.

It was not perfect.

Because her actions had been obstructed once before, the archangel wished for an increased amount of practical power. The archangel knew well what the material needed for that was. She ruled over water. Russia in winter was covered in snow, but even melting all of that would not be enough.

But it was not enough.

It was not perfect.

But it was not enough.

It was not perfect.

But…hwsr…it was not enough.

It…zvdf…was not…zdfb…perfect.

Bu…gggaaaaaaaaa.

That's right.

She needed to be extra sure when it came to the overwhelming power needed to turn around the situation.

It had to be a large amount of ice that had special signs and symbols.

For example, the special ice that existed at the planet's pole.

"What is going on…?" moaned a nun of about 20 within St. George's Cathedral of London.

She was the one monitoring the flow of magical power within Russia.

“Misha Kreutzev has begun to move north at high speed!! At the same time, the ice at the North Pole has begun to rapidly melt!! I have detected a powerful line of Telesma between the two! A mutual interference between them is clearly being created!!”

“Is she making a new power? …No, she might be replenishing her physical body,” Stiyl muttered while frowning.

When he thought about it, if that angel instantaneously melted the ice in the Arctic Ocean, it would create a phenomenon similar to a large scale tsunami for the areas around the Arctic Ocean. And if the situation continued to its extreme, an absurd phreatic explosion covering an area with a radius of 1000 kilometers could occur.

Also, it would not just be that simple. Misha Kreutzev was already brutal, so how much would her power increase if were she to absorb enough water and ice to destroy the Arctic Ocean? Now that Fiamma had been defeated, what was that archangel after? It was possible she had no real goal. He had no idea what was going on, but what it would lead to in the end was clear.

They could not withstand it.

To begin with, he doubted the materials of the physical world would be enough to support the full capacity of an angel created by God. Even the Misha Kreutzev from Angel Fall had been in imperfect manifestation. If Misha tried to force out an output greater than the hypothesized amount, the physical body she was made of would explode emitting a massive amount of Telesma.

It would be like a planet exploding at the North Pole.

At the very least, all life would be annihilated on the northern half of the globe. It was possible that it would cause a major error in the planet’s orbital trajectory that would cause it to leave the solar system.

(But how are we supposed to stop her?)

Stiyl looked over at the whiteboard that had magnets automatically moving across it.

(It’s unclear whether we could hold back the former Misha even if we fought as a group. A conflict with an archangel wounded like that would only increase our damages.)

But if they did nothing, things would definitely head toward a destructive conclusion.

And then…

“…Hey, what are you doing?” muttered Stiyl without thinking.

There was a change in the Star of Bethlehem’s trajectory despite it having been continuing on quite well before. It had started to move along a route clearly different from the one Stiyl and the others had planned. He thought it had to be a malfunction in the fortress, but according the data being monitored, no such problem was occurring.

Kamijou Touma had clearly done something to the large ascent spiritual items to purposefully send the fortress off of its safe route.

He had done so in order to stop Misha Kreutzev as she headed for the Arctic Ocean.

The speed of descent increased.

Kamijou Touma ran with everything he had within that fortress.

At the shore of the Arctic Ocean, at that threshold between land and sea, Kamijou had forcibly destroyed the large ascent spiritual items in order to distort the fortress’s trajectory of descent. He focused on nothing but running in order to oppose the archangel.

There was something odd on the surface of the earth.

Some kind of small form was approaching at high speed.

Kamijou saw the white snow torn up along the path of whoever it was that was soaring along at low altitude with tremendous speed. The snow was not simply

being blown away. All the snow within a few hundred meters…no, within a few kilometers of “her” was being absorbed.

A thick, long line was being drawn along that white land as the archangel approached. No one could stop her from advancing. There seemed to be human forms firing light that appeared to be magic, but the archangel paid them no heed. She merely passed through and the professional magicians were blown away.

The archangel passed the shore and made it to the Arctic Ocean.

At the same time, the Star of Bethlehem fell straight down from above.

With a great roar, the archangel and the giant fortress fell into the ocean. Inside the sinking fortress, Kamijou used everything he had to head further and further down. Unable to stand up to the great pressure, walls and pillars within the fortress started to break one after another. The freezing seawater flowed in, but Kamijou paid it no heed. He focused on nothing but heading lower…heading deeper. The fortress fell below sea level.

There was no longer any illumination.

There was a single point of light in the vast darkness.

The peaceful light was blue and deep. It was reminiscent of moonlight.

Kamijou Touma clenched his right fist with all of his strength. His opponent had noticed him. The light in their eyes clashed within the darkness before the real clash. The mere human boy who was overflowing with a tremendous killer intent continued forward without stopping to the very end.

A lot had happened on his way there.

It had all started at the point where he had lost his memories. He had continued forward after lying to a certain girl in order to not sadden her. He had fought an alchemist to rescue a girl who had special blood. He had fought the strongest monster in order to rescue the #3 Level 5 and her Sisters. A fight to the death had unfolded with a traitor of a classmate in a beach hut. A lot had happened on August 31st. He had stood up to a real golem in order to save his friend who was an aggregation of AIM diffusion fields. He had picked a fight with the largest

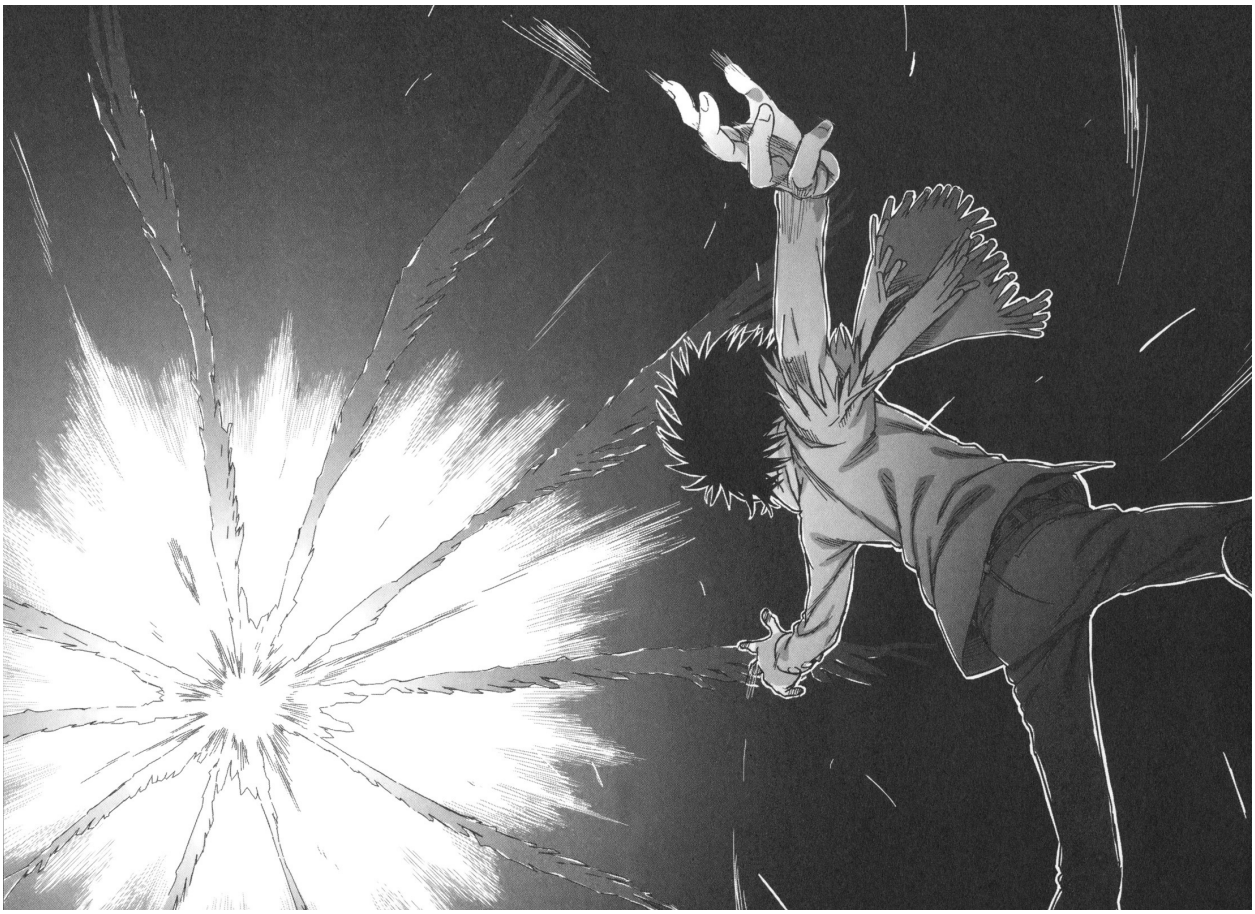
denomination of the Christian Church in order to save a nun who claimed to have deciphered the Book of the Law. There had been an incident related to an underclassman of the girl from Tokiwadai Middle School. During the Daihaseisai, he had protected Academy City from the threat of the Croce di Pietro while it had gotten the coordinating committee member and his other classmates wrapped up in it all. In Chioggia of Italy, he had assaulted an ice fleet in order to save a girl who had once been his enemy. On September 30th, he had clashed with a woman from God's Right Seat in order to save his friend who had been completely changed. He had enjoyed delicious sukiyaki with his classmates and then had fought Skill-Out in order to save the mother of the girl from Tokiwadai Middle School. In Avignon of France, he had fought God's Right Seat over the C-Document. With the help of the Amakusa Church, he had fought a powerful Saint in Academy City's underground district. In London, he had stopped the coup d'etat led by the second princess.

And now…

(It's been so long.)

Not all of the things that had happened along the way had been enjoyable.

He had hurt others and been hurt by others again and again and again. It was all a cycle of those two things.



But Kamijou Touma was still able to run.

He knew those actions had saved quite a few people.

And so he was able to head straight forward to face his greatest enemy yet, an archangel.

(It’s true that this world may be destroyed one day. Even planets have a lifespan and I know it will be swallowed up by the expanding sun even before that is reached. And the odds of all life being wiped from the face of the earth before even that happens may be rather high.)

Kamijou thought as he charged forward with his clenched fist.

(But it does not have to have such a tragic end. There’s nothing wrong with fighting to stop this.)

With a great crash, the two forms clashed at the middle point.

At the same time, the giant Star of Bethlehem was crushed and destroyed as it had received the brunt of the shock from the fall.

And…

On October 30th…

Academy City and the Anglican Church.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Third World War that had started from the conflict between those two allied forces came to an end.

At the end of the war, the aftermath of the Star of Bethlehem's fall into the Arctic Ocean had been examined.

The water had done some damage to the cities on the shore, but no one had died.

The shock from landing in the water had utterly destroyed the fortress itself.

The Archangel Misha Kreutzev had been headed for the Arctic Ocean, but no sign remained of her. It was assumed that the power supporting her existence had disappeared and she had returned to a different phase upon becoming mere energy. The melting of the ice in that area of the ocean had been confirmed to have stopped.

There were no signs of survivors in that area of the ocean.

Search teams from an alliance of the three major Christian denominations had been dispatched, but no survivors had been found in that 2 degree seawater.

Kamijou Touma ended up welcoming a second "death".

Epilogue: Silence and the End of the Boy. *Silent_to_ Small_Fire.*

“That bastard…” Stiyl Magnus said in almost a groan within St. George’s Cathedral of London.

He had received the report that the Star of Bethlehem had fallen and Misha Kreutzev had been crushed from above. But no matter how great a mass it was, he doubted a true angel would lose simply to great pressure. At the time of the crash, that right hand had likely been used to fight that monster.

When he thought about it, hadn’t that boy chosen that kind of method ever since he had first met him?

In order to save the girl named Index, hadn’t he unhesitatingly stepped forward tearing off all the chains even if it meant receiving a shock great enough to erase one’s memories.

A gloomy atmosphere was created in that cathedral separate from the great celebration of victory. Business-like reports continued to come in reporting that Misha Kreutzev had disappeared and that the four great elements had been reset to their proper positions.

Stiyl heard a slight noise.

He turned around and saw Index limply coming his way. Her small hands were leaning on a stone pillar and her footing was unstable as she looked over at the whiteboard.

“Where’s Touma?”

No one could answer that question.

Right after Index had awoken within the cathedral, she had been unable to get up

out of the bed, but she had still managed to inform Stiyl of the frequency that would connect to the Star of Bethlehem. She had not been told of anything that had happened after that. The other priests and nuns may not have been able to tell her the truth as she made her way there. And now she had finally made it to that room. She had made it to that room where all the outcomes were known and where only a gloomy atmosphere remained.

She looked around once more looking at the faces of everyone there and asked her question again.

“Where’s Touma?”

They needed a means of escape.

Hamazura Shiage dug into the snow with a thick branch.

Just before he had been attacked by Mugino Shizuri, the Russian special unit had been bombed by a super large Academy City fighter. The steam dispenser and the other major equipment for the bacterial wall had been utterly blown away and the unit had been neutralized a bit away, but the truck they had been trying to use to escape should have just been buried underneath the snow during the avalanche.

In the end, he had found nothing.

The dissemination of the bacteriological weapon and his battle against the #4 were over. The Academy City unit that used weapons that were not of that world tempered using Dark Matter had been defeated.

At first glance, it may have seemed like an amazing result that seemed to overturn his label of Level 0. However, Hamazura and Takitsubo had originally been searching for something they could use to negotiate with the higher ups of Academy City. They had merely ended up heading down side roads rather than heading along their intended path.

They had not found anything to negotiate with.

If they stayed there, they would be killed.

They had to leave as quickly as possible.

As Hamazura single-mindedly dug into the snow, Takitsubo and Mugino were doing the same thing with similar thick branches nearby. Mugino was Academy City's #4 Level 5, but due to the Body Crystal and the previous battle, she did not seem to be in a state where she could use Meltdowner any time soon.

Takitsubo readjusted her scarf that was starting to come undone and then looked over at Hamazura.

"Hamazura, what are we going to do now? Are we going to recover one of the masks that attack unit used and try to negotiate using it?"

"We'll gather up what we can, but I doubt that'll be enough. I'm not sure they would even send what could be their Achilles heel into the middle of enemy lines. For the deep darkness of that city, something like that would still be within acceptable limits."

"We can use my blood as our insurance," said Mugino joining in the conversation while moving the thick branch. "It contains the DNA map of the #4. If we make three chips with my blood on them and each take one, we may be able to increase our chances of holding them in check while we're split up."

"…God damn it."

But Hamazura averted his gaze from them. His hands digging into the snow stopped. Takitsubo and Mugino thought he was looking at something far off in the distance, so they turned their heads to see what it was.

That was when they heard multiple footsteps kicking about the snow. The next thing they knew, a half circle of men was surrounding them at a distance of about 10 meters. It was an Academy City assassination unit dressed all in white from the tops of their heads to the bottoms of their feet. The men wore masks and goggles so not even the shapes of their faces were visible. They held carbines equipped with silencers.

They had likely been monitoring Hamazura and the others to make sure they were doubly and triply prepared.

Compared to the parts of the darks side of Academy City that had an especially

large amount of power such as Mugino Shizuri or the previous masked men, those attackers were organized rather simply. That unit was aware of exactly how exhausted Hamazura and the others were, so they had sent in the most suitable force.

Their time was up.

When he realized that, Hamazura's heart started to break even more than the weary body it should have been within. It made him jealous of Takitsubo and Mugino who were still glaring at their enemies with a fighting spirit in their eyes.

No, those two girls likely understood.

Takitsubo Rikou and Mugino Shizuri had carried out an important role to the darkness of Academy City, so they were worth using. It may not be the same as before, but there was still the possibility that they would just be "recovered". However, Hamazura was different. It was odd that he had been standing atop the stage at all. Even if the higher ups had chosen the option to not kill them and recover them instead, that only applied to Takitsubo and Mugino. Hamazura alone would be shot to death right then and there like a piece of trash.

That was why those two were showing an intention to fight.

He was glad.

But at the same time, he felt a bit of relief somewhere within himself. If he played his cards right, he could keep the sacrifices down to a minimum. They had not found anything to use to negotiate with the higher ups due to his own ineptitude. That was why he absolutely had to prevent any more damage from being done. Hamazura now had a clear goal in his mind.

"…Honestly, you've made a lot of trouble for me."

A new figure appeared approaching Hamazura and the others from among the 10 men surrounding them. It was a woman wearing an elegant suit tinged the color of chocolate. However, she had a full face helmet on her head ruining the atmosphere the suit created. Her behavior had a well-bred feeling to it which made her stand out in that environment.

“Although I suppose it’s a testament to the strength of our security that it was contained at this level.”

“Who are you?”

“Your partner,” the woman in the helmet and suit responded immediately. “You may know me best for my focus on passing orders along.”

“What’s the phrase you have a habit of using.”

“It’s always like this with you.”

After that response, Mugino and Takitsubo exchanged glances. Of course, what had happened would not be overlooked just because a common acquaintance was there. The world was not that kind.

The woman in the helmet and suit continued.

“I’m sure you have a pretty good idea how things are going to be divided up from here on out.”

“…”

“Mugino Shizuri and Takitsubo Rikou will be immediately recovered. As for Hamazura Shiage, that is where things get a bit tricky…well, he just doesn’t fit the same conditions. There is a relationship there that could give him value as a hostage for Takitsubo, but Takitsubo Rikou does not have much in the way of physical ability, so mental restraints are not really necessary. We can just isolate her in a concrete room to do research on her. If we need to force her to do something, imbedding tiny balloons in her brain and then repeatedly applying pressure and relaxation to the cerebral cortex by remote control will suffice.”

“Wait,” Hamazura said as if cutting her off. “Research? On Takitsubo? Don’t you mean Mugino?”

“I’m sure at least those two have realized it.”

“Realized what?”

“When you defeated the unit with the masks tempered using Kakine Teitoku’s

Dark Matter, Mugino Shizuri used Meltdowner. But Takitsubo did not simply guide her using words. Her AIM Stalker interferes with AIM diffusion fields. She used that and it had an effect on Mugino Shizuri's Personal Reality and partially forced her aim into alignment. …Or perhaps it would be better to say she temporarily rewrote it with corrected information."

(You don't mean…)

He had heard that Takitsubo had tried to do that in order to fight Kakine Teitoku.

And Mugino Shizuri had possessed some Body Crystal.

"No." But Mugino readily negated that idea when she saw Hamazura's expression. "Takitsubo did not use Body Crystal. Or rather, we did not do that because we had planned to. If she had an established way of interfering with a Level 5, her role in Item would have been different. …After all, she would be able to strengthen espers or send them out of control at will if she could do that."

The woman in the helmet and suit shrugged and added on to Mugino's comment.

"The project to make Takitsubo the Eighth was originally separate from Body Crystal. We had a result from Tree Diagram's simulation, but the realistic conditions were too severe, so we could not achieve it. That was when we turned our attention to Body Crystal that just barely had similar effects. …Although all the simulations using it had hopeless results."

"…And yet you still continued to mess with Takitsubo's body."

"That was because the possibilities were just too valuable. After all, if she continued to evolve and become the Eighth, her AIM diffusion field would be able to be used as an intermediary to freely control other espers' Personal Realities. I'm sure you're not so stupid as to not understand what that means."

If she could actually do that…

Personal Realities were the source from which all psychic powers and phenomena were brought into the real world. If they could be controlled, it would mean more than just increasing or decreasing an esper's level. Simply put, Hamazura Shiage could be given the power of Railgun and Mugino Shizuri could be brought down to being a Level 0. Controlling them would give one the

ability to switch out powers and modify the system at will. Dual Skills would enter the field of reality. In that way, reason and skill could be ignored and ridiculous results could be created.

She would be able to give someone any power she wanted at any time she wanted and she would be able to rob someone of any power she wanted at any place she wanted. If she wanted to, she could increase the number of Level 5s or she could strip any opposing esper, even the #1 known as Accelerator, of their Personal Realities and then kill them while they were defenseless.

That went even beyond becoming the Queen of Academy City.

There was only one word that accurately referred to that kind of existence.

“Takitsubo Rikou alone could carry out every function that Academy City does,” said the woman in the helmet and suit giving her response. “No, if she could instantly create whatever power at whatever level she wished and discard that power at any time if it was no longer necessary, she would be able to produce espers even better than Academy City can.”

She was a person with an overwhelming value.

She even overturned the idea that there were only seven Level 5s.

“From the beginning, Takitsubo had a rare potential, but getting her to bloom has been difficult. We dug into the research of the taboo-committing Kihara family and pulled out the Body Crystal despite knowing the risks, but the stimulus was not enough to produce the results we wished for. …But now the path to the Eighth has been opened. It is all thanks to your lovely relationship and this cruel war.”

As far as Hamazura knew, the only time Takitsubo had seriously tried to interfere with another esper’s AIM diffusion field was when the #2 Kakine Teitoku had been about to kill Hamazura. Had the higher ups of Academy City seen that and decided to let them go free in order to provide a chance for her to bloom?

And Takitsubo had acquired a small key.

Even if it was difficult then, she would reach the position of the Eighth if the

research continued. Even without using Body Crystal, she could become that fearsome monster that could completely hold all of Academy City's espers in her hands.

She could do that alone.

She could do it with just her one power.

She truly held the ability to equal or surpass all functions of the esper production institution of Academy City.

If that city was Academy City, she could be an Academy Individual.

But that was not what surprised Hamazura Shiage the most.

The impact of the concept of the Eighth was overshadowed by something the woman in the helmet and suit had said that Hamazura could not overlook. It was something that no esper of Academy City, even a drop out like him, could accept.

"…From the beginning, Takitsubo had a rare potential?" Hamazura said in a trembling voice to make sure. "In other words, you knew before she took part in the Curriculum? No matter how much people work or how much they study, the ones who will succeed will succeed and the ones who will fail will fail?"

That response was more frightening than hell.

Of course, Academy City had the System Scan. Various methods were used to check on the aptitude of an esper. It checked what Level they were at, what type of power they had, and whether they would grow easily or not.

However, that was supposed to just be a rough estimate. The students known as Level 0s and Level 1s believed that they could grow if they worked hard. That was why they were able to work hard. They believed it would all pay off eventually. They believed they would bloom eventually. That was all they wished for.

And yet…

Were the people who worked hard and grew from a Level 0 to a Level 3 merely

people who were established from the beginning to be able to reach Level 3? Were the potentials sleeping within individual people all determined before they started studying and before they even entered the schools? Was the myth of gaining more skill by working hard just a means of manipulating the people who were at their set upper limits?

In that case, was there any hope for the people who were determined to be Level 0s from the moment they were born?

"…Come to think of it, I did find it odd," said Mugino Shizuri as if she had recalled something. "I caught a glimpse of a project involving the #3 once. She was tricked when she was a little kid in order to provide her DNA map. That map was used to mass produce military cellular clones. …But when you think about it rationally, the time period does not make sense. I'm pretty sure that the #3 took time to work up from Level 1 to Level 5. In other words, at the point when she provided her DNA map, she was not yet a Level 5."

The idea of military clones was shocking, but Hamazura did not think it would be impossible given Academy City's technology.

"In other words, did the researchers know from the beginning that she would become a Level 5, so they got ahold of her DNA map ahead of time?"

In response, the woman in the suit gave a heavy breath within her helmet.

"Well, there are some problems with the Parameter List. For instance, the DNA patent and the living resource of a Level 5 are very valuable, but quite a bit of money is needed to obtain them. However, with a Level 1 who possesses the possibility of becoming a Level 5 in the future, those things can be obtained much more cheaply. When a fragment of the list is leaked, problems occur where blood is shed in secret due to people trying to get rich quick off of it."

"…"

"But if you look at everything together, I think it works out as a positive thing. Putting together complex Curriculums for people who aren't going to grow is just a waste of time, money, and resources. By distributing what would have been wasted with a focus on the useful espers, it is all much more effective in the end."

“You…bitch…!!”

It was Mugino who yelled out, not Hamazura.

Takitsubo tried to hold back the enraged girl. Seeing that, the woman in the helmet and suit let out a cheerful voice.

“That reaction is quite unlike you. After all that fighting, have you begun to empathize with the feelings of the weak?”

“Shut up!!” Mugino yelled with anger in her single eye. “So you’re saying Hamazura has fallen this far because you people just gave up on him!? Takitsubo and I headed down this path on our own. Our journeys and the environments that led us there were complex and I don’t think our trajectory can be corrected just by solving a single problem. But Hamazura was only pushed down this path because he had no power! You people decided that he didn’t on your own and held back on his Curriculum!! It’s true he may not have become a Level 5. He may have stopped somewhere along the way. But if you had actually given him an equal chance, he would have had the possibility to grow even if just a little!! If…If that had happened…!!”

Hamazura Shiage may not have joined Skill-Out.

It may not have been necessary for him to be swallowed up by the even deeper darkness of Item.

He may have been able to live a normal school life rather than being forced to flee from Academy City.

He may have gotten that boring but happy life that no one else there had been able to obtain.

“It’s fine,” Hamazura said to Mugino while shaking his head.

He was glad that she had remembered how to become enraged properly.

“We are Item. I do not regret that, so it’s fine.”

Mugino averted her gaze as if she could not stand it.

Hamazura changed the subject while unaware what expression was on his face.

“More importantly, you said something that caught my attention.”

He confirmed the conditions in his head.

“You mentioned the Parameter List, so I’m guessing there is an actual file. Its existence could send every student living in Academy City down to the depths of despair and helplessness. I don’t know what your higher ups are trying to do, but I doubt they want to risk having the city stop functioning. In other words, we still have something we can negotiate with.”

“You may have some uncertain information, but are you saying you have a chance to obtain the real thing? The system is set up so a student like you would not be able to get his hands on it. And more importantly…”

The metallic clattering of multiple guns was heard.

The men in white battle outfits surrounding Hamazura and the others had aimed their guns.

“Did you forget? At the very least, this is the end for you.”

Mugino could not use Meltdowner.

Takitsubo’s AIM Stalker had no effect on anyone other than espers.

Hamazura could not singlehandedly take out a team of ten battle professionals.

And…

“Aren’t you the one forgetting something?”

“?”

“You may have lost sight of this because you live in such a filthy world, but this is not Academy City. We are not standing atop such a cruel stage. I am a mere Level 0. I do not have any kind of special power that would allow me to survive such a major conflict on my own.”

“…”

The woman in the helmet and the suit must have decided there was no point in listening to him any further because she raised her arm slightly.

That was all it took.

The men in white battle outfits surrounding Hamazura and the others pulled the triggers of their carbines in unison.

Sharp piercing gunshots resounded in that white plain.

The color red scattered about seeming to distort the pure white of the scenery.

Hamazura did not shut his eyes.

There was no reason for him to.

“Wha—?”

That voice of surprise came from the woman in the helmet and suit. Hamazura was the one who was supposed to collapse after the gunshots, but he did not. Nor did Takitsubo or Mugino. It was a few of the 10 men surrounding them.

At the same time, a group of about 30 men and women armed with assault rifles came from behind trees and rising hills creating an even larger ring around the men surrounding Hamazura and the two girls. They were Russian, but they did not seem to be proper soldiers. Their clothes were civilian ones, their rifles were covered in scratches, and they had an odd sense of livelihood.

“Are you alive, Hamazura!?” Digurv shouted out in Japanese.

Glickin, who was next to him also holding a rifle, clicked his tongue and spoke.

“We told you to escape, but in the end you came back. You alone we can’t abandon!! So are they with the special unit that was setting up the steam dispenser!?”

“…That’s not quite it, but thanks. You saved our lives.”

Hamazura took a slow breath and relaxed his body.

While he had been talking with the woman in the helmet and suit, he had caught

a glimpse of them in the scenery. Afterwards, all he had to do was draw out the conversation until they could finish getting in place.

"…Why?" The woman seemed to truly be feeling nothing but doubt. "In the war, Academy City was so easily pushing back the Russian army. How could we be stuck in predicament like this so easily…?"

"Academy City had such an advantage during the war because the troops moved cooperatively on a large scale and looked after each other. …An independent unit running around on it like you isn't going to have that same invincibility." Hamazura forced a smile out of his cheek muscles that had been completely stiff up to that point. "Isn't that right? If every single person was invincible, Takitsubo and I would never have been able to escape Academy City in the first place."

"Do you think you've won?" the woman in the helmet and the suit said with a sneer.

She did not seem to care about her collapsed colleagues.

"The system that has been monitoring you all up until now is still active. Reinforcements will be here soon. The end result will be the same."

"Probably…but that's why we'll be ending this before that happens."

After saying that, Hamazura spoke to the people from the village.

"Digurv, Glickin, you tie up the men in the white battle outfits. Watch over them to make sure they don't make any odd movements."

He then turned toward Item.

"Mugino, you restrain Takitsubo. I'm about to do something that's going to provoke her a bit."

"What are you…?"

The woman in the helmet and suit started to say something, but Hamazura did not give her a response.

Instead of words, he pulled out his handgun and suddenly shot her in the right elbow and right knee.

Two dry gunshots rang out and the woman's screams continued afterwards. Hamazura's expression did not change. He grabbed the collar of her suit with both hands and dragged her along the snow.

"…There is a slight cave about 100 meters ahead. We'll finish this there." His voice was completely flat and free of emotion. "An Academy City pursuit unit will be here soon. I need to get our means of negotiation before then, so I'll do whatever it takes to make that happen. I'm after the Parameter List. You can output it on paper or give me a password so I can access the data on the network, I don't care which. Just tell me everything you know. I'll make sure to go far enough that you'll be telling me before you realize it."

"E-ee!"

"Humans really are scary."

Hamazura brought his mouth up next to the helmet and spoke in a quiet voice so Takitsubo and Mugino could not hear.

His voice was completely flat.

"As long as they can make the excuse that they are doing something to protect those they care about, they can do any kind of cruel thing. That's how I see it anyway. I'll be showing you just how cruel humans can be."

Accelerator was collapsed atop a hill.

Neither Last Order nor Misaka Worst was there. Only the white snow stretched on seemingly forever around him. At an altitude of 8000 meters, he had been struck by the mass of strange energy fired by the fortress, but not even he really understood what had happened after that. The white wings had disappeared from his back. At the very least, he understood that he was alive like that because the great destruction had been stopped at the last second.

He heard a loud noise.

It was a large transport helicopter with two rotors. As Accelerator lay on the ground looking up into the air, the giant mass of metal slowly lowered nearby. The sliding door opened and people got out. They were more like a disaster relief team than soldiers. They were wearing baggy spacesuit-like protective suits and he could see them lowering down a stretcher with belts on it.

They were recovering him.

Accelerator recalled when he had defeated Kihara Amata on September 30th. It was the same as then. A large conflict had invited in great turmoil. In exchange for taking care of the problem, he would be handed over to the dark side of Academy City where he would have to carry out dirty jobs.

In the end, no matter how much he fought it, no matter how far he fled, even if he left Academy City, and even if he escaped Japan altogether, he could not escape that giant cycle. He had vaguely sensed it before. The environment and conditions surrounding the Sisters and Last Order were much more severe even than those for himself. He doubted they could have a proper life without the backing of Academy City.

His limp body was lifted up and put on top of the stretcher. Then a number of thick belts were wrapped around him. Accelerator's body was stored aboard the large helicopter as if they were transporting a tool…no, a weapon.

He did not resist.

With quite a bit of shaking, the transport helicopter left the ground.

Accelerator muttered blankly while still strapped in by the belts.

"Where are those brats?"

"With a different unit," was the short response.

"Hm," Accelerator let out a short breath. "Then promise me this. Do not send out any more orders to use that brat or the Sisters as a shield. Freeze the Third Season project. Whether it involves killing them or creating them, don't play with even one more of their lives for your own convenience."

"…"

“Free all the others who are in similar circumstances to mine. I won’t let you force dirty jobs in this world of darkness on anyone else by using anyone or anything as a shield. If I see even a single example, I will bare my fangs in your direction. No matter how many times it takes, I will crush you all as often as you carry out these atrocities.”

“It seems you do not understand anything. Do you really think you’re in any position to negotiate?”

“You’re the one that does not understand anything.”

With just that one statement, the researcher in the protective suit must have detected some kind of danger because he immediately moved his hand to the side of Accelerator’s neck. His esper ability had to use substitute calculations from the Misaka Network. The researcher was trying to check on the switch to the electrode that accessed the network.

But Accelerator had used that mentality against the man.

The instant the researcher’s fingertips pressed against the switch, Accelerator swung his head to the side while still strapped in by the belts. As a result, the finger held against the switch ended up sliding the switch to maximum.

His power returned.

The black belts binding his body were blown away in an instant. The man in the protective suit was blown to the helicopter’s wall and deep cracks ran across the reinforced glass in the window on that wall. The fellow researchers around him stood up in a panic, but it was too late.

“This is not a negotiation, a suggestion, a deal, an entreaty, an agreement, a compromise, or a capitulation.”

Accelerator’s arm touched the wall of the transport helicopter.

The metal wall of that military craft was destroyed as easily as tearing through paper. A great amount of cold air blew inside, but the men in the protective suits did not care about that. Terror over not knowing when the helicopter would be brought down swept throughout the helicopter.

Amid that, the king of monsters who reigned atop awed fear gave a proclamation.

“It’s my triumphant return, you fuckers.”

As he used a single finger to play with the helicopter’s bare minimum of aerodynamic balance, a smile seemed to split across Accelerator’s face.

“I think I’ll start by saving that brat and Misaka Worst.”

Fiamma of the Right opened the metal door from the inside using a trembling hand.

Due to the damage eating into his entire body, he could not stand up. He practically fell out of the escape container.

He was on top of a small mountain.

The Star of Bethlehem that he had created was nowhere to be seen. The color of the heavens had returned to normal. The sound of bombardments that had continued unceasingly before was now gone. Everything was silent and white. As he looked at the Russian scenery outside the escape container, Fiamma received a vague answer.

It was all over.

Fiamma did not know what would become of the world. At that time, he had indeed chosen the best option. Since he had been repelled, the world must have been continuing to slide down that hill. He could not hazard a guess how far it would fall or if it would digress onto a different route in the process of falling.

That boy had suggested that the world would live on.

That had not just been on overly simplistic view that did not apply to reality. That boy had stuck to it with everything he had even to the point of handing his sole means of escape to another.

Then go find out on your own from now on.

Those final words were annoyingly stuck in his head. Due to that, Fiamma now lay atop the ground instead of just becoming buried below the snow despite no longer having a goal. Of course, his path from then on would be a dangerous one. The man who had created turmoil in the world and caused a war would be pursued. He could not get help from the Roman Catholic Church or the Russian Orthodox Church. God's Right Seat no longer existed. He had lost Index's remote control spiritual item. Even with a special power residing in his arm, Fiamma would eventually run out of breath if he continued to fight an inexhaustible supply of enemies while in his restricted state. In that world of the victors, Fiamma would be treated as the one remaining blot.

A life on the run would likely wear down his body.

He doubted he would be able to find what that boy had suggested while stuck in a life like that.

"…"

But for some reason Fiamma did not simply abandon the chance left to him by another at the risk of that person's life. At that time, that boy had clearly seen something Fiamma could not. He hesitated to abandon that while he did not know what it was.

He would decide what came next after heading forward.

Despite having lost everything, that thought brought strength back to Fiamma of the Right's body and he staggered to his feet where he took his first step.

And then…

Suddenly, Fiamma of the Right's right arm was severed at the shoulder.

He had been utterly unable to detect the activation of the magic for the strike or the preliminary signs of that activation. The attack fired at Fiamma from behind had mercilessly carved his body apart. His right arm was the symbol of his power. Having lost that arm, Fiamma screamed while scattering red blood across the white snow.

He held the wound with his other hand and turned around.

A strange magician was there.

He had waist-long pale silver hair. He had a graceful face with an expression on it that's identity could not even be guessed. In the freezing cold, he was wearing only a green surgical gown. He had an odd atmosphere that made him seem both male and female, both adult and child, and both saint and sinner.

Fiamma knew.

Fiamma of the Right knew that magician.

But…

"…Aleister Crowley…?"

"As expected, I seem to be accurately recognized while outside my 'container'. I use life support devices to mechanically create my life force which is the basis of magic power. That has allowed me to slip past all sorts of probes, but I suppose it should be obvious that I do not receive that divine protection while in this state."

"You're…I see…but there is an inconsistency in that theory. It does not explain why you are here."

"There is nothing strange about that." The magician who should by all rights be inside the windowless building in the center of Academy City responded as if that should be obvious. "The woman named Anna Sprengel was said to have carried out the role of the Secret Chief and of a point of contact and to have helped in the foundation of the Golden cabal, but in the end, it was said to be dubious whether she even truly existed. …I too functioned as the point of contact for Aiwass who is one of the theories of the Secret Chief. To be honest, I do not think that is the exaggerated and much too serious role in charge of things like giving permission for the foundation of all the magic cabals in the world. In fact, I do not think there is any need to get permission for such a thing. But, well, I am the same type of existence as Anna was said to be. As such, it should not be too surprising to think that I have surpassed the realm of only being expressible as 0 or 1."

Even then, Aleister Crowley still existed in the center of Academy City.

But at the same time, Aleister Crowley existed before Fiamma.

Multiple versions of him such as a clone did not exist.

It was just that the single one of him existed in multiple locations.

It was a phenomenon that destroyed the basic concept of counting, but that was just what the domain at the top was like. The Sephirot used various words and numbers to create an explanation of the spiritual world, but organizations above a certain level could not be explained using words, so they were intentionally omitted.

Did someone who entered that domain reach one of those upper organizations or did reaching one of those upper organizations cause one's domain to transform into that domain?

At any rate, Crowley was in a different dimension.

He was in a higher place than Fiamma who had declared he held the power needed to save all of humanity while he was still an existence that could be counted with that world's numbers.

"…Why?" Fiamma muttered. "I could not do it. I should have had the power needed to save this world just like the Son of God. And yet I could not do it."

"It was not an issue of the type or amount of power. It was nothing more than an issue of how you used it," Aleister Crowley said in disinterested voice. "My theory is that the age of Christian spells came to an end upon the completion of the Book of the Law. I actually think you did quite well. And that includes your objective of becoming The One Above God. If instead of the Aeon of Osiris… that is, the laws under the control of solely the Christian Church, you had formatted it in the Aeon of Horus that lies beyond it, you may have had your eye on a position similar to mine."

He was the one who created supernatural powers with science.

He was the one who constructed an angel by gathering those powers.

Fiamma of the Right, the one who ruled over Michael, understood what that meant. Creating an angel was not the same thing as simply creating a new type

of living creature. They were the symbols of the elements that made up the world. For a human to create one of those, it meant that the system at the base of that world was being artificially interfered with.

Gears created by human hands were being inserted into the mechanisms created by God. It was like remaking a music box into a time bomb.

It was the idea of affirming the occult and then trying to use precise equipment on it.

In an older time, just thinking of those things would get one sent to the gallows.

"…Is Aiwass that attractive an existence?" Fiamma asked. "An angel that cannot be explained by the Bible or theology is also the symbol of an element that is inside this world created by God and also outside of the hands of God. It is the beginning of the destruction of the fate established by God. …You did not want the Book of the Law. You wanted the strange angel that granted you the Book of the Law."

Aleister did not confirm or deny that.

"Well, I was not originally supposed to appear at this stage," said the magician who was said to be the worst in the history of magic. "Even if you do not understand the values of things, you saw a bit too deeply into that right hand. You caught a glimpse of what is inside of it, when it would have been best for you to only have recognized it as a mere right hand that can negate supernatural powers. I simply cannot let this go. I was reluctant, but I had to make an appearance."

"Of what is inside…?"

"And on top of that, it ended like this. He has now left my grasp. Thanks to that, I will have to take a bit of a 'detour'. …I see. So a being such as myself may still be able to feel common anger."

"…"

Fiamma's eyebrows moved ever so slightly.

He was recalling whatever it was that had flowed out from within when he had

severed that boy's right arm.

"What was that?"

"I'm sure you know," he responded as if spitting out the words. "Other than the fact that the format you were basing it on was much too old, what you were trying to do is very similar to my plan. They are both the idea to change the world by preparing a temple filled with strange power, drawing out the power of the right arm within that temple, and readjusting the thickness of the phase itself with that power. How is Academy City different from a small world that has sealed a certain type of power? You just need to look at your own actions from a different viewpoint. Just by doing that, you should be able to understand the true nature of that power. …If you had succeeded in doing that, you may have reached our goal before I did."

That was why Aleister had come there.

"Those parchments. They were incomplete as they were gathered by the Russian Orthodox Church, but it would be a problem if they were analysed by an anti-magician organization such as the Anglican Church. I sent out a rather showy unit this time, but, well, all that matters is that they were recovered in the end. … But that alone is not enough. Do you understand what I am trying to say?"

Fiamma was in the way. Aleister had come to utterly destroy even the slightest chance of his own plan being calculated out from the incomplete incident Fiamma had caused. As such, Fiamma would not even be allowed to be taken into custody by a magical organization. At that time, Fiamma came as close to the truth of the world as he ever had.

"I see." He only had one arm, but Fiamma of the Right slowly shook his head. "…But that no longer matters."

Oddly enough, his expression lacked the strange passion it had held up until then.

It was as if some kind of evil spirit had left him.

"When I see you, I can feel the futility of what I did. Most likely, I had that same look on my face. And someone who can truly save the world would not have that expression on his face. ...At that time and in that place, he stood in a position

where no one could overtake him.”

He felt like he had come to a bit of an understanding as to what he had lacked.

As he thought that, Fiamma purposefully removed his left hand that was pressing against his wound to prevent blood loss. At the same time, a small explosive noise exploded out. The blood spewing out showed the outlines of a large invisible arm. It was his third arm. He could no longer control that power with his own will, but now he could fight.

“I believe this to be futile.”

Aleister Crowley did not seem to make any real preparations for a fight. He stretched out the fingers of one hand and slowly grabbed something invisible. Fiamma perceived something odd while the man made that pantomime-like motion. He thought he saw a staff seep out there where nothing should be. No, it indeed did not exist in the real world. And yet he saw an illusion even to the point of seeing the color silver due to unclassified information sources such as feeling a presence or an atmosphere.

It was the Blasting Rod.

That staff was from the legends of an ancient magician who Crowley, the man known as the ultimate villain, truly respected as his master.

“It is not an issue of whether it is futile or not,” Fiamma said quietly.

Most likely, Aleister would not understand even if he tried for 100 years.

If the feeling of truly wanting to save someone took precedence, it would be strange if something like the odds of winning did not end up being secondary.

Then go find out on your own from now on.

Someone had unhesitatingly answered in that way to an enemy who said he did not understand just how vast the world was. That person had to know a lot more than Fiamma. He had to know all sorts of things that were not recorded in any grimoire original. Fiamma was not even sure if he had come to understand even a fragment of that, but that was why he had the following thought.

He could not allow it to be trampled on.

Even if he had to face a true monster, he could not allow the world that boy had risked his life to save to be trampled on any more.

It was obvious at first glance who won and who lost.

Two forms clashed and one of them fell from a slope of the mountain.

Silence returned to the snowy plains of Russia.

The victor glanced down the slope and spoke as his body dissolved into the air.

"…You tried to explain that right hand, Imagine Breaker…and even The One Who Purifies God using only something at the level of Christianity. That was your mistake."

And there was a smiling figure in distant London.

"We have a reaction!! It was only for 700 seconds, but this wavelength is unmistakable. It belongs to the magician Aleister Crowley!!"

Inside St. George's Cathedral, Archbishop Laura Stuart's lips twisted up creating a smile as she received that Anglican nun's report.

That man was supposed to be dead.

That magician was supposed to have been killed by Anglican assassins.

He had been officially reported to have died over 60 years before, but a Crowley-specific post still existed in order to deal with magic cabals claiming to be his successor or the theorized survival of the man himself. And now a spiritual item set to search for him individually had produced an unexpected result.

Although for Laura Stuart, the result was "unexpected" in the same way that the theory as to the origin of the universe existed but no way of proving it had been found.

The search spell that used farsightedness was mostly useless because even the general outlines in the images that rose up were blurred. The target appeared to be speaking with someone, but neither figure's details could be seen.

Even so, Laura was convinced with just that small bit of information.

The look of his face had changed quite a bit.

And on top of that, he had to have been obstructing anyone from recognizing him up until then by some means.

But…

(…So he really is alive.)

She used the words "really is" because she had not believed that he had ceased to exist.

It was true that the ones who had gained the most from World War III were the victors in Academy City. From then on, the relationship between the magic side and the science side would unavoidably tilt heavily in the direction of the science side. The power of the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church had been weakened, and while the Anglican Church had been victorious, it was nothing more than one of the three major powers of the Christian Church. On the other hand, Academy City was the single major organization at the top of the science side. Just due to the simple distribution of power, Academy City would clearly outdo them in how much power over the world they gained with their victory.

But it would not end there.

If the identity of Academy City's board chairman was as Laura suspected, she had the right to destroy Crowley. And traditionally, the assets of the target of a witch hunt would be seized by the church.

In other words, they still had a chance to completely absorb Academy City and the science side.

Of course, even if her suspicions were correct, she doubted he would obediently go along with it all. She could not deny the possibility that a fourth great war

would occur. However, that did not matter. As long as she had a chance, as long as she had the beginning of a means to bring the entire world into her hands, it did not matter at all.

The Royal Family had feared that, whether Academy City or the Roman Catholic Church won World War III, England would be walking down the path to being weakened. The second princess and the others had started a coup d'etat because of that.

Laura Stuart's response to that was the following: If so, then you just need to take everything the victors have for yourself.

The right to execute the magician Aleister Crowley and to take charge of his dangerous assets belonged to the anti-magician organization of the Anglican Church.

If the Roman Catholic Church had won, the Christian world would have expanded decisively and the magic side would have ruled the world. As such, it would have been harder for her to create an excuse as just one denomination of the Christian Church. At the very least, she would not have been able to seize things using the Inquisition.

That was what Academy City had been for.

And now things had conveniently ended up heading down a pleasant path.

"…Now then. Things are only just starting to get interesting, Board Chairman Aleister."

"Heh heh," came a small laugh on top of a building in Academy City.

The existence known as Aiwass laughed while looking down at its hands. It was clearly enjoying itself. Accelerator's interference in Last Order's consciousness had drastically reduced the power securing Aiwass's existence. Soon, Aiwass would temporarily withdraw from the "surface". Even so, Aiwass was cheerful.

"…You look like you're enjoying yourself."

That voice belonged to a girl.

She was Kazakiri Hyouka.

The gaze behind her glasses had a sharp light in it that was rare for her usually frightened self.

“I am happy,” Aiwass said in response as it lightly spread out its hands. “Or rather, I am rejoicing that the pleasant time looks like it will last even longer. Aleister is in a little too much of a hurry. It will all be over in no time at all with methods like that. It is like having someone hit a domino from the side before you have managed to line up very many of them. If I am to enjoy this situation, it is best if I temporarily head down to a deeper place. Livestock must be fattened up before they are eaten.”

“That is what you are doing this for?”

“Indeed. Regardless of whether I had appeared or not, that control tower would not have lasted long. There was a lack of strength in the lining up of the dominos. As such, I gave him the hint he needed to provide the needed strength. …And he did well. That method was less eliminating me and more of a transference to a different domain, but, well, that was enough to be an excellent job.”

Did it have value or interest?

That was the criterion on which that existence acted and it was an existence that could easily destroy the planet were it to decide the planet were unnecessary.

“I think you should learn more about humans.”

“?”

“It is odd for you to not know in the first place. Our physical bodies are supported by their power. Enough possibility sleeps within them to give us form. It goes without saying that humans are incredibly strong beings. …If you take them lightly, you may find yourself stabbed through the chest before long.”

“What are you saying?” responded Aiwass without holding back a sense of exaltation even while receiving Kazakiri’s gaze. “If those fragile humans could

actually do that…wouldn't that be a truly interesting case?"

Misaka Mikoto arrived at the coast.

However, it was a very different place from a beach on the Sea of Japan. It was a small fishing harbor, but she did not know if it was active at that time of year. After all, the surface of the ocean was covered in white ice. It was drift ice.

Due to the VTOL craft running low on fuel, it had been necessary to land.

They had boarded a high speed freight train, but they had still been decisively late.

They had pushed on and pushed on and pushed on in the direction the flying fortress had gone and they had finally ended up at that fishing harbor.

Perhaps due to the evacuation order just before the fortress had crashed, there was no one else around. The roads were covered in ice possibly because the cold had frozen the moisture after the tsunami had hit.

She could not find the slightest thing that would act as a clue to that boy's whereabouts.

Mikoto looked around the area as if she was at a complete loss as to what to do, but she finally picked up a large stick. She stretched the stick down from the concrete bank and stirred up the ocean water that was wrapped in ice like a soda from a café.

Some kind of small mass of plastic got caught on the end of the stick.

"What is that?" asked the Sister from the side.

Mikoto did not respond.

She recognized it.

It was a Gekota strap that had been torn off at the string by some great force.

It was the item that the two of them had acquired on September 30th.

Proclamation of Armistice.

We can't let this meaningless war continue.

Our side has clearly examined the conditions proposed by Academy City, and we will continue to discuss this. We'll negotiate about the details, but we can assure that Russia will not end up disadvantaged.

In the past, we ignored the advice of the public, followed the suggestions of a few people and were unable to undo our choice. As for how tragic the situation was, I suppose everyone knows it better than I do. Regarding this historical error, we can't make any excuses.

At least what I can do is to end all these abnormal situations as soon as possible, and let the world regain the peace that it should have had.

Before all of these end, we shall be punished.

So before that, please give me some time.

A minority may be unhappy with this result, and may feel that putting down our arms isn't what we should do. However, I want everyone to calm down and think: what were we fighting for? If it's to fight for our family, our friends, our lovers, all the people that are important to us, this is the time, the moment to get all of 'these'. Continuing to fight will only cause you to lose 'these'.

The thing that made us recognize this were the actions of everyone on the battlefield.

Facing the supernatural disaster near the end of the war, we chose a 'correct' move that was way above us, helping everyone, enemies and allies, without any difference. I believe that we can accept this ending.

From now on, I declare that all fighting will cease.

I hope for everyone to agree with this decision, and will be recorded for a future peaceful world to see.

30th, October

Archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church

Krans R. Tsarskiy

Battered and bruised.

His right hand had been cut off.

Exposed to the cold snowstorm that was like blades, being unable to move even a finger. At this rate, he would be buried under the snow.

At that moment,

Snowy footsteps could be heard. Thinking about this as he faced the sky, he saw a human shape. Instead of saying that they walked near, it was more like they both had appeared at the same time, an unnatural way of appearing.

An enigmatic duo.

One of them was a blond woman. She had goggles on her forehead, a thick material dark-colored jacket and an apron used for work. It looked crude, but on closer inspection, it was rather tasteful, and it gave off the feeling of an English maid.

The other person was a blond man. His aquamarine thin shirt was accompanied by a camel-colored lambskin vest.

Though it's not good to talk bad about others, both of them were wearing clothes that seemed ill suited for moving through the harsh snowstorm. Not only that, the duo's expressions had not changed.

The woman spoke first,

"At least he looks like he's breathing."

"It's purely because of his ability. There was no need to hold back then,"

The man replied, and then looked at the face of the man on the ground.

"Now then, I'm sure you do not want this to end without getting back at him. At the very least, we're about at our limit. ....We will give you a place to live and ensure your safety for now. In exchange, we want you to tell us what you saw and heard. We may able to read between the lines of the Aeon of Osiris you are from to see Crowley's Aeon of Horus which comes after."

"Wh, who...?"

He,

Fiamma of the Right, asked in a hoarse voice.

"Ollerus."

After that, the answer was simple.

His words conveyed the entire message.

"I am a pathetic magician who once should have become a Magic God, but had that position stolen by One-Eyed Othinus."

Afterword

To readers who have followed this series book by book, long time no see.

To readers who bought all twenty-four books at once, nice to meet you.

I’m Kamachi Kazuma.

This time, it’s Volume 22. So now the God’s Right Seat arc has finally concluded… Starting back in Volume 11 with Vento of the Front, no matter what, this is an arc that has spanned ten novels.

This is a good opportunity to talk about the three main characters.

About Kamijou Touma:

He’s a "relative" character at all times. If there are no magicians or espers who possess supernatural abilities around him, the ability to "negate" them can’t be shown. It’s the same when ideals clash with ideals; most of the time, you aren't taking the initiative but rather reacting to your opponent. If Touma’s opponent were a normal person who has an unshakable resolve, Touma will probably suffer defeat. Also, against that kind of opponent, "there is no reason to clash".

Now, if the Hamazura Shiage who has grown somewhat defeated Kamijou in a normal fight, there will probably be a balance between the three main characters. That would be very interesting; what do all of you think?

In this volume, there are probably many readers who feel that Kamijou isn’t quite like how he is in previous volumes. Though, compared with character growth, the main reason is probably more due to his opponent being too abnormal. If we look at it as "The ability which can restrain a strong power is more powerful", then Kamijou Touma’s position has risen.

Originally, he’s an undefined character.

If he finds that his cat has gotten lost, he'll do all he can to try and find it. If there's a threat to the world, he'll also use all his strength to stop it from happening. Even though he acts in a serious manner, as the nature of the event changes, the direction that he's serious towards also changes. Kamijou is then such a magical character.

Also, in this series, there have been several characters that can be called "Kamijou's opponent". These are all characters that were made by taking some aspect of the character Kamijou Touma as a base, but with some changes added. In other words, Kamijou himself has many sides to him to begin with.

The impression that the world of "Toaru Majutsu no Index" gives is that there are no overarching plot or characters that specifically pertain to it. Some are just picking various characters as the main protagonist and then telling the stories around them (this is especially true for SS2). Though every protagonist has a story that makes them shine for one moment, Kamijou Touma gives the feeling that for him, from the battlefield with shells flying past to having a Chinese hotpot cook-off, he would be a suitable character regardless of the situation… but that's not saying that he has many talents. Having a "so-called main character" who knows nothing but still charges ahead would probably make this story easier to write. If he is forcibly made into a "specialist of a certain area", then when it comes to problems outside his specialty, there would be deeper questions to worry about.

About Accelerator:

From another perspective, Accelerator who's been written as a "dark hero" has traces of a Saint in him. He has the kind of feeling that a person who has committed a great sin but then stepped onto the difficult road to redemption in order to redeem themselves gives off.

As proof of surpassing his trials, his wings have completely changed colors… I've wanted to try writing a scene like this for a long time now.

From the bottom of his heart, what Accelerator wants is not a lover but a family. In spite of knowing nothing about what a family is, he's still been able to act as a parent for Last Order (though it's unknown whether as a father or a mother), although there are some contradictions with how he acts as a child around Yomikawa and Yoshikawa (most prominently, the scene in Volume 15 where

Yomikawa takes the gun out of his hands).

While being a symbol of his past, the title of a "Villain" had also given him a good reason to run away. In this Volume 22 where he surpasses being chained down by "Good" and "Evil", he undoubtedly will now head towards the direction of a "family".

About Hamazura Shiage:

In this war, regardless of it involving Kamijou Touma or Accelerator, both of them have been dragged into something beyond common sense. So, this character has the job of making the readers feel the atmosphere of "war".

Needless to say, what's been entangling him are his grades at school—i.e., being branded as a "Powerless Person (Level 0)"- though after seeing the results of the schools' teachings and the system scans, being called by the upper levels of Academy City as "the typical child whose future has been misled by adults" would not be wrong. He's personally shattered the chains that were holding his heart down, and, at the same time, has saved his companion who's being weighed down by the chains of being an elite "Level 5".

Despite the fact that we're talking about the Hamazura Faction that's not on the science side or the magic side, the topics coming up are getting close to the core of everything. The so-called "specifically made potential espers who can rise to Level 5"... "Dark Matter" is a special exception, so it can't be verified, but no matter if it's Accelerator or the "Railgun", apart from being simply biological resources from the industrial point of view, they're simply "delicious", no? The seventh Level 5 who appears in SS2 should be fairly powerful, but why is he only the seventh? Regarding this kind of question, from this point of view, the answer should be more obvious… At first glance, the fifth seems to have little value, but when used in disciplines such as sports and medicine, there'd be great benefits.

…And, though this is only in jest, in terms of relationships and all related matters, I feel that Hamazura has made the most progress. In this type of situation, the only main character who can answer questions like "But haven't you already chosen >insert person here<?" is probably him. A certain spiky-haired boy somewhere else seems to have gotten into this problem as well.

Thank you to Haimura-sensei, who's in charge of illustrations, and Miki-sensei,

who's in charge of printing. Because it’s the conclusion of the God’s Right Seat arc, there are many large-scale scenes, and the illustrations have probably gotten harder to draw. To have listened to some of my more troublesome requests, many thanks.

Finally, thank you to all you readers out there. For the God’s Right Seat arc to have a story this grand, your help and support plays a crucial role. To have supported my impulsive settings and developments, I am very grateful.

Then, we will conclude here this time.

Hope you'll flip open this book next time as well.

I’ll sign off here.

Next time: “The world that has been saved”!!

Kamachi Kazuma.

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 22

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War Report 4 - Teh_Ping | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Chapter 9 - Part 2, Section of Part 4, Intermission 6 - Flere821 | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Chapter 10 - Section of Part 3 - anonymous imageboard user; Rest of Part 3, Intermission 7 - Flere821 | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Chapter 11 - Flere821 | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Chapter 12 - Parts 1,4 - anonymous imageboard user; Parts 2,3,5,6, Half of Part 7 - Flere821; Other Half of Part 7 - Cosmic Eagle | Redone by Js06 — Completed.
Epilogue - Preview Script Parts 3,7 - anonymous imageboard user; The Rest - Flere821 | Redone by Js06 — Completed
Proclamation of Armistice - Teh_Ping — Completed
Afterword - Flere821 — Completed